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*The
Emerald of
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By Hilaire Belloc

*With Illustrations by
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*Publishers
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To Maurice Baring

MY DEAR MAURICE:

This is the fourth book I have dedicated to you, and you will see why if you read it—which no one need do.

First, emeralds are green; and, on principle, like the Green Overcoat, it owes to you of the Green Elephant, a dedication. Next, there is Catherine the Great. She plays no long part, but she founded the fortunes of them all; and we are in communion in the matter of that large and generous but regal soul; we agree that it is a pity she died before we were born. Also, you who know all about Russia, and I who know nothing, have, in the matter of Russia, this Monarch of all the Russias for a link.

Lastly, you have often urged me to write a detective story, because (you assured me) they have gigantic sales. I promised you I would, on condition there was nothing to find out.

Here it is.

KING'S LAND,
Whitsun, 1926.

*The
Emerald
of
Catherine
the
Great*

8

The Emerald of Catherine the Great



Chapter One

 WILLIAM BONES was a stalwart man, some thirty-five years of age, the master of a Brig which sailed from the port of Boston in Lincolnshire and was half his own property. He was a native of that town, his father having been therein a pork butcher in a fair way of business, his mother the daughter of a small farmer in the Wring Land. He traded with the Baltic when George the Third was King—indeed, when George the Third was still young and long before George the Third first went mad.

Among other ports, he had found profit more than once in visiting that of the River Neva, and was acquainted with the Russian trade. The great city of St. Petersburg, still new but already splendid, became familiar to him; and he himself, in his humble visits to the local factors, became a familiar figure to the Secret Police of that capital. Even his most domestic and private actions during his dealings in this port were registered; and, it must be added, his strong English frame and handsome English face admired, but also duly noted and their description passed on to the proper authorities.

On his third voyage to Russia he was honoured by the invitation of a merchant somewhat wealthier than the common of his acquaintance and at that table met some official of the Court, of what exact situation his ignorance of Russian and of French forbade him to inquire. Before returning to his native Lincolnshire, his happy spouse and his young family, he enjoyed the singular privilege of a further unexpected invitation from this same Court official whom he had thus chanced to meet, and so found himself at supper in one of the smaller and more discreet rooms of the Palace, upon its mezzanine floor, in a choice company of both sexes.

It is characteristic of the Empress herself—a great woman!—that a large humanity and a laudable curiosity combined rendered her indifferent to the conventions of rank. No sooner had she heard of the British merchant captain's cheerful and manly habit than she desired a more exact description, upon her receiving which he was permitted an entrance to the Presence.

He enjoyed, partly by means of an elderly female who interpreted for him until he had improved his few words of German—the Empress's mother tongue and most familiar idiom—no little conversation with the august sovereign, who, when he arrived at this stage, deigned to keep him by her alone for some while. The interview was repeated upon more than one occasion and her Imperial Majesty was so good, upon his reluctant leave-taking some two or three weeks after his first arrival, as to press him with an invitation to return.

Next season, the moment the Baltic ice was melted, he did so, disposing of a mixed cargo; and, while leisurely

awaiting his return charge, was almost daily conveyed to the Palace from his humble lodging. For four successive seasons running this strange adventure persisted.

Meanwhile his Boston neighbours could not but remark that his home in the British haven of which he was a native and mariner, showed a considerable advance in prosperity. His wife was better dressed, his growing family could boast an increasing and superior acquaintance among children of a rank with whom they would not earlier have mixed. It was even whispered that Bill Bones had made formidable investments in the City of London, which he certainly had visited more than half a dozen times during his last winter stay in England; and though his friends very charitably agreed that the profits of the Baltic trade might be large, and that Bill Bones might have had exceptional opportunities, they none the less talked among themselves upon the various possible sources of a fortune which that trade could hardly account for.

With the fifth season there came an end to what had certainly been a remarkable series. Whatever advantages communion with a throne might have had for William Bones, the future would no doubt show; but the fifth season was the end. There had been farewells, and yet no loss of the high regard in which, for some extraordinary reason, he had been held by the Semiramis of the North. He had acquired a certain assurance of bearing which marked his new fortunes, and indeed, in this final scene of his presence upon the quays of St. Petersburg, he seemed by his gait to be some one of consequence. And no wonder, for he had left the Palace for the last time bearing secreted

in the bosom of his ample coat a jewel worthy to be a memorial of the greatest passages in any life.

It was an emerald, exceptionally large—the largest, he had been assured, in the world—square in shape, of the purest water and set in a delicate little gold mounting after a fashion which recalled the ornaments of the French Court.

It speaks well for Captain Bones that on his return to Boston he handed this jewel to his wife, who thenceforward had it fixed with a pin, to serve the office of a brooch, and wore it upon great occasions; notably at a dance given by the mayor of the town, to which she brought her eldest daughter, though barely of an age for such ceremonials.

The next year William Bones let his house in Boston and abruptly transported himself and his family to the metropolis. His neighbours were interested to discover that before abandoning them he had purchased not a little property in the town and had even appointed a substantial agent to deal with his rentals. He was clearly an advancing man and their respect for him grew profound when they learnt what figure he now cut in a world above their own. In London he was found entertaining largely and standing upon an equal footing with merchants of repute, though not perhaps as yet of the first fortune. Meanwhile he had preferred the name of Bone, in the singular, to that of his earlier life, conceiving it to be more consonant with his present position and his residence in Cornhill and his interests in the banking world.

His only son George, when of an age for such occupations, which was some five years after the family had come up to London, was taken in as a partner by Mr. Worsle

the India merchant, partly, no doubt, as a testimony of friendship to his father, but partly also because William Bone, who would now indifferently sign himself Bone or Bohun—the original form of the name—had put at the young fellow's disposal a very considerable capital.

William Bohun himself died somewhat prematurely in the eighth year after his transmigration, and his wife, who, though much desiring to cut a proper figure in her new world, had never properly succeeded in doing so, followed him within three months to the grave. Her younger daughters had received an excellent education; her eldest, born in her father's earlier days, had perhaps less refinement of accent and deportment—but on the other hand, her solid worth and quite exceptional dowry had procured her alliance with the heir to Sir Philip Goole, a landed gentleman in the West of England possessed of a fine town house in Cavendish Square, but indifferent to politics.

George de Bohun—he had at first rejected but later began to use the prefix “de” which a friend in the Heralds' College had suggested to him—prospered, I am glad to say, exceedingly, as the son of such a worthy father should, and acquired the playful nickname of “The Nabob,” which spread from the city to the more exalted circles into which he was welcomed, west of Temple Bar. It is a sufficient indication of the respect in which he was held when I say that he was elected to Brooks's Club, and there, by his generous behaviour at the card table, failed not to become a favourite with the most exalted of his contemporaries in Whig circles.

It may or may not interest the reader to know that upon his father's death it was discovered that the Emerald

of Catherine the Great had been made an heirloom and was devised by an explanatory letter—since the law could not enforce such a succession—for the eldest son, or, failing sons, the eldest daughter of the reigning de Bohun on arriving at his twenty-first, or her eighteenth birthday, his or her parents or trustees being its successive custodians until that date. Failing such a personage, the jewel was to be passed to any cadet branch, the eldest in succession. If the great line of de Bohun should fail—which Heaven forbid!—the sacred object was to be buried with the last of that illustrious lineage.

The legal complications to which such a disposition would give rise need not concern us, for in fact they never arose. George de Bohun had but one son, Richard, born in the same year that saw the death of General Bonaparte, the famous Corsican adventurer. To this son in his old age he conveyed the jewel with the instructions concerning it, but he had previously got rid of its unfashionable Louis XVI mounting and had it set again, now as a pendant, after the fashion prevalent in the first years of Queen Victoria.

Mr. George de Bohun had acquired—perhaps from his father—an unusual reverence for the gem which he believed, with a mystical devotion curious in a business man, to be in some way the tutelary genius of his House. He would frequently tell young Richard, his heir, during the boyhood of that philanthropist, the story of how Catherine the Great herself had given it to his own father, the grandfather of the lad, when that powerful genius was engaged upon a secret diplomatic mission to the Russian Court. Hence had the emerald come to be known by the title of “The Emerald of Catherine the Great” in the private circle

of the de Bohuns—pronounced “Deboons.” That it should be preserved in the family, certainly never sold and—please God!—never lost, was a religion with George, which grew more fanatical as he approached the tomb. He came, perhaps from an idea inherited from his father, to regard it as a necessary condition of their prosperity, and he imbued his son Richard with I know not what vague fears of disaster should its possession be abandoned or should the stone itself be mislaid.

This second in the great line, George de Bohun—pronounced Deboon—the son of its founder, though born as long ago as 1780, lived to see the inauguration of the Hyde Park Exhibition by Queen Victoria in 1851, and, having refused a peerage, closed his eyes in the fine country house known as Paulings.

This mansion was—and is—situated in Herts, at no more than twenty-five miles from Westminster. The successful Russian merchant purchased it upon advantageous terms from the bankrupt and disreputable Parrall family, whose last and seventeenth representative not only proved incapable of preserving the patrimony of his ancestors, but had joined the Romish Church and perished miserably at Boulogne.

Richard de Bohun was of course the “Dirty Dick” of mid-Victorian politics, and an intimate friend of Lord Palmerston. There is little to record of him except that after doing good and lucrative work in two administrations he also refused a peerage; in which he was wise, for though the family fortunes had not diminished, the general increase of wealth around him made his position less conspicuous than that of his father had been in the City of

London. Indeed, the family was now no longer connected with trade.

He died—as he had been born—at Paulings, a country house of such absorbing interest that I shall later be compelled to describe it in accurate if tedious terms.

The now reigning de Bohun, called Humphrey—after an illustrious ancestor, the Humphrey de Bohun who fought at Bannockburn under Edward II and undoubtedly held land, through his wife, in the neighbourhood of Boston—the son of this statesman, is the Mr. de Bohun—pronounced Deboon—of our own day: the highly respected Home Secretary who has already passed with such distinction through what he himself will call the *Cursus honorum*, having been Parliamentary Secretary to Harry Gates during all of the great Paramooka Scandal—when he was the Baby of the House—then successively rejected by Middleham West after the Seychelles Scandal—when Gates went to the Lords—elected after a second attempt by Middleham East, Under-Secretary during the period of the Second General Strike and at last, after the usual vicissitudes of public life, occupying the exalted position which he still adorns.

His figure is familiar to the public, I fear, rather by early photographs than by recent portraits. He is a man tall and carefully clothed, with a rather weary expression, set on a long face, with insufficient grey hair neatly brushed. He is of a courteous demeanour. He is much attached to his country life at Paulings, so happily convenient to London, and sheltered from the large growth of suburban villas about it by a dense fringe of more or less ancient trees. He is a widower, possessed of three motor cars, but with

only a flat in town. He has refused a baronetcy, for he has (alas!) no son, but one daughter, now just entering her nineteenth year. The name of the charming child is Marjorie, and it was but recently, upon her eighteenth birthday, the 15th of January, that her father somewhat solemnly presented her with the famous heirloom.

He had used no little ceremonial, speaking a little pompously of her dead mother—a Ginningham—of the immemorial traditions of their house, and with curious insistence upon the supposed influence of the jewel upon their fortunes. He smiled somewhat lugubriously as he touched that point, but Marjorie, though not extravagantly intelligent, had brains enough to believe in omens, mascots, talismans, and was proud, as a girl should be at her age, to enter upon the possession of the Sacred Gem of the de Bohuns.

Her father had discarded, for so great an occasion, the Victorian gold setting which, he was assured by Mr. Marolovitch and other experts, was in deplorable taste. The jewel was now set once more—by Mr. Marolovitch—as a brooch, since a woman was to wear it. The new setting was in platinum, designed in the finest taste of Berlin, with writhing curves and dead square divisions of the most entrancing variety. Large as the Emerald was, and its new Prussian setting adequately broad, yet the whole lay easily on the palm.

If it be not blasphemy to suggest any inefficiency in our Teutonic cousins, I should suggest that the pin was a thought too long and capable, on careless handling, of biting the hand that fed it. But for any such trifling defect the grey colour of the new and more expensive

mounting, resembling that of a leaded grate, and the awful severity of its odd rectangles and unexpected heavings of its re-entrant curves, made ample atonement. Such was the aspect of the Emerald of Catherine the Great in the winter when it entered upon its liveliest activities.

Chapter Two

BOUT a fortnight had passed since Mr. de Bohun had given his daughter Marjorie the family mascot. It was Friday, the 30th of January, 1930: the weather unpleasantly cold, overcast, with a threat of snow, and the dark already set in.

After the heavy strain of an English working week, especially in Parliament, complete relaxation is necessary from Friday after lunch to the Monday's return to town by the afternoon. Nor was any mansion more fitted to recuperate the exhausted energies of statesman or politician than Paulings.

It had been built in the classical manner some twenty years before the decline of the Parrall fortunes, which got their worst blow after the year 1745. It was classical and highly symmetric; its fine great doors had been designed to stand slightly above the level of the drive and looked upon a shallow sweep of stone stairway. Upon either side of them, windows in the Palladian fashion, with a pediment above each, announced the wealth within; a hanging wreath of flowers and fruit in stone went the length of the great wall, and against the sky was a balustrade.

That was all very well for the eighteenth century; but the nineteenth and the new wealth of the de Bohuns put on useful excrescences. There was a bulb to the east, and yet another bulb at the end of that, where new stables, now a

garage, were added to new offices, and on the west there had been built, a little after the Crimean War, something like half as much again of house room, in a manner pleasingly different from all the rest. Here a new and more convenient door gave into a large hall, not without suits of armour purchased at considerable expense, and giving by various doors into the larger, older, and grander rooms of the house, into a panelled dining-room, a large drawing-room, too often changing in style, and on the extreme west a room very rarely used save for the reception of whatever was not wanted about the living parts of the house, or—in theory at least—for the complete seclusion of its master, when—in theory—his heavy responsibilities demanded heavy concentration.

This room we must know, for it was here that blind Fate, an all-seeing Providence, or—more probably—a lively and mischievous sprite had laid the scene of the loss of the Emerald.

The room was not large; it was in good proportions, for it dated from a time when we were still civilized. It was strangely appavelled. There was a large, rather shabby desk, at which the Home Secretary was supposed to write and where he did at least leave accumulated a few old letters and kept them down with a paper-weight of Chinese crystal, carefully chiselled into the form of a little god who smiled.

There were five deep chairs of the sort called lounge, upholstered in a leather almost black. There were as many more comfortable common chairs. There was a really good fireplace brought over from one of the old houses in Dublin, of marble with a Bacchic frieze. There was in front of

that really good fireplace a rug made of the skin of a polar bear, singularly fierce in its open red mouth of ferocious grin, its gleaming teeth and staring eyes—the room was so deserted that no one had knocked that head to pieces with his feet. It seemed almost new, fresh from the Arctic.

There were six windows looking to the west, south, and north, and coming down close to the floor with deep sills forming seats after the fashion of our fathers. For the room projected out into the park upon three sides and the western one faced a long grass path between an avenue of trees. There were one or two tables which did nothing, after the fashion of most tables—outside dining-rooms, and even there they do no work which I can recommend. There was above the mantelpiece one of those looking-glasses of the First French Empire, round, lens-like, and diminishing the picture of all the room. It had a round, broad, gilded rim and upon its summit an eagle of the sort that flew from the Pyramids to Cadiz, from Cadiz to Paris, from Paris to Moscow, and from Moscow back again.

The floor was of the sort called, I believe, in the trade, antique Austrian parquet. That is, it consisted of some half dozen slabs of cheap pine firmly bolted together, on the top of it a veneer of herring-bone Baltic oak, chemically treated to simulate the age and dignity of Schönbrunn. The thing was designed for rapid laying down and lifting and fitted together simply upon joists with what are—again technically—called invisible screws, but at the corners of the room the contraption was held by certain clamps which wanted a hell of a lot of hammering down when it

was fixed. On the surface of this dignified flooring lay, carelessly chucked about, a few Oriental rugs from Brighton and one charming little Chinese mat from London, damnably out of place and swearing with the rest of the room like a cat run up a tree from a dog.

What else was there in the room? Ah, yes, there was a parrot cage, and if you are wise, unfortunate reader, you will pay particular attention to that parrot cage, for later on it has a speaking part.

It hung by a chain from the ceiling against the west window looking out on the long avenue, and within it lived—not melancholy, for he was too stupid, but in a mixture of stolid age, indifference, and nothingness—the parrot Attaboy. Nor must I omit either the appearance of the parrot Attaboy, but only later can I tell you how the parrot Attaboy came by his name.

Of his lineage I know nothing, nor even of his age. He might well have been one hundred. Certainly there was nothing young about his eyes or gestures, and I have always heard that parrots, like family servants and others whom the gods hate, live to a great age.

Aunt Amelia had made a pompous present of him three years before to her beloved niece Marjorie after her beloved Marjorie had reached her fifteenth birthday; she bestowed not only the parrot but the cage, and simultaneously a kiss upon her niece's forehead. At first the recipient of the fowl did not appreciate the gift. But love will grow. The thing—by which I mean the cage and the parrot and all—was hung by a hook—at Aunt Amelia's expense—to the roof of this room simply because it was so little used.

It happened precisely at the opening of the flat racing season, three years before the opening of the story which you now have the ecstatic pleasure of reading, that young Lord Galton, Marjorie's cousin—recently acceded to the title by the sudden and unexpected death of his father from I know not what forms of excess—had pulled a horse.

He was one of our modern youths, loving the risks of life and living dangerously. Therefore had he pulled a horse and the horse he had pulled—his very own—he had named Attaboy.

It was never brought home to him, as the phrase goes; that is, everybody knew that it was true. Attaboy was famous at Paulings—a sort of family crime to be proud of—a word used as often as any other for the moment at Paulings; and the poor old parrot—we have no initiative in age—picked it up and refused to learn anything else.

In a way it was awkward. Tommy Galton would come to his uncle's house from time to time, and when he came it was rather important to keep him out of the West Room during daylight. For the parrot had a way of croaking quite suddenly, in the strong colonial accent of his tribe, "Attaboy!" at the most unexpected moments. However, the parrot Attaboy possessed a cover of black felt carefully put over his cage at night, and whenever it found itself in darkness it was habitually silent after the honourable fashion of parrots—and, after all, the room was not commonly used. There was little risk of Lord Galton's being in it save after the black cover was over the detestable bird.

Of Attaboy the parrot—Attaboy the horse had already gone to stud—Marjorie grew fond. For one thing, she was not unattracted by her cousin Tom, and Attaboy made a

sort of bond between them. For another, she was at the age when women can be fond of anything, even Tommy Galton, let alone a parrot.

So much for Attaboy and the deserted room.

It has been remarked—without payment—by more than one philosopher that the great events of this world arrive through the action of agents who did not intend them. And this you will find to be true of Attaboy, of the Polar Bear, and the deserted West Room.

I think it only fair to add, since I am writing a detective story, that when Aunt Amelia visited her brother the Home Secretary, which was, all totted up, for something like a third of the year, she was given the principal guest room, known in the family as Bannockburn, which lay immediately above.

So much for Paulings and its now famous, then deserted, West Room; its Parrot, its Polar Bear.

I return to that winter week-end, that cold January Friday and the few gathered in the great drawing-room of Paulings round its tea table.

It was not a party: it was a family meeting of a very few people.

Old Lady Bolter, a much elder sister of the Home Secretary, known among the Great as "Aunt Amelia," we have seen was half a permanency. She had already given them three weeks of herself a month before; and she had now settled down to another bout. They suffered her in this fashion often enough; but as for her, she knitted. I have read in one of those books which are published anonymously upon the people of that world, that she had been famous in King Edward's day for her wit. Maybe. She would



Dear Aunt, so good, so kind, and a little deaf.

hardly be famous for it now. However, she was not nearly so blind nor so deaf as she pretended to be. She had met most people up to the Great War and resembled a sheep.

Victoria Mosel was there, Marjorie's friend of another generation, still sinuously moving round and round from house to house forever. There were two men, close relatives, cousins: an elder and a younger.

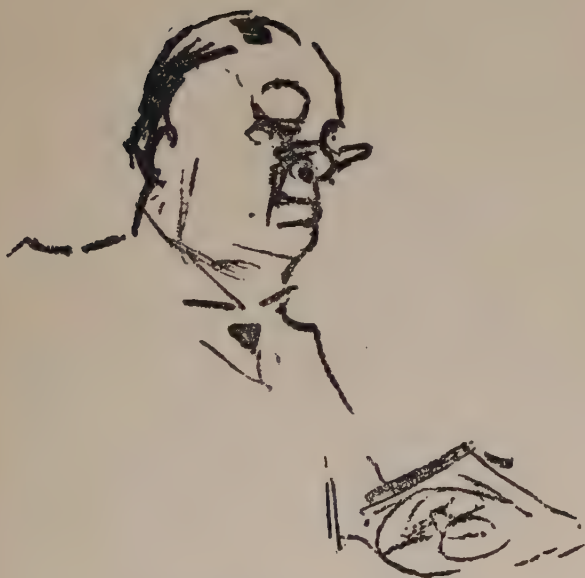
The first was the hippo-phile, the expert in things of the Turf whom you have just heard of, young Lord Galton, the son of the Home Secretary's first cousin, Cecily, who had brought to Algernon, first—and very nearly last—Lord Galton, a sufficient dowry, drawn from the then ample funds of the de Bohuns, for her father had been the younger brother of the Home Secretary. But this first—and very nearly last—Lord Galton indeed was dead, and so was Lady Galton his wife, and the young man, now his own father, found his inheritance less than he might have desired. The Galtons, wisely taking their title from their name, had not done well since they had left Liverpool; they had left that town too early. So here he was, a tall, dark young man, a little too solid and certain of himself, and—unhappily—attached to racing, a pastime for which his fortune might have been sufficient fifty years ago, but was not at all sufficient to-day.

It was not every house in England in which Lord Galton would have been welcomed; but family counts, and he was here, with his rather sullen face, strong chin and fixed mouth, and sub-challenging eyes. They were sub-challenging because of Attaboy the horse. He had not suffered as he might have done; he went a good deal less to one or two of his better clubs than he had done before the rumour spread,

but he was still a constant member of the Posts and gambled there assiduously and with some success. Yet was he always embarrassed, and his embarrassment did not help his reputation.

He sat at the tea table that afternoon, fighting the boredom of Aunt Amelia with what was toleration if it was not courtesy, and looking at Marjorie without admiration but perhaps with intention. Now and then he cast a furtive sharp look, when he thought it was safe, at Victoria Mosel. She always knew too much, and as she stood there in front of the fire, with a sham vacant look on her shrewd face, and the eternal cigarette hanging from her lip, he wished her farther.

The second guest at that table, next to the Home Secretary himself, was yet another cousin, but a whole first cousin this time—the only son of the youngest uncle of all, who had married very young and very imprudently. Wherefore was the said cousin, William by name, unable to go into the City, and, compelled to become a Don, had become by profession a professor. For a first cousin he was rather absurdly older than the head of the family. The Home Secretary, who had himself married late, was not more than fifty-five; but the Don, William de Bohun, Fellow of Burford and holding the Chair of Crystallography, was quite ten years older—perhaps a little more. He had a simple pride in the excellence of his birth, a distracted manner due to his immense learning—not indeed in the general field of the Humanities or the Arts, but upon the particular point of dodekahedral crystals—and even of octohedrals he had a smattering. Such was his fame that he had been mentioned more than once in the proceedings of learned societies abroad and had been



*Mr. B. Leader, Reader in Crystallography to the
University, reading in Crystallography to the
University.*

elected Corresponding Member to the Crystallographic Society of Berne.

Unmarried, with a small private income, the poor nest egg of his improvident father, amply endowed, with no pupils to speak of, and the dodekahedral hobby, he would have been as happy as it is possible for an atheist approaching death to be, had it not been for the existence of that infamous charlatan, Bertram Leader, not even a Fellow of St. Filbert's, and mere Reader to the University in Amorphous Crystallogogy.

I need not insist on the gulf that separates crystallography, a true science, from crystalloggy, its base mercantile application. To the one, as was but right, a chair was attached; a chair founded by Z. Leizler the philanthropist, before his flight, and now occupied by the aged figure of the de Bohun. The other was thought hardly worth a Readership at £600 a year, and only under secret threats had that wealthy college, St. Filbert's, been persuaded by certain City men whom B. Leader in his turn had threatened, to cough up. It took its revenge by admitting B. Leader to its high table, and refusing to elect him a Fellow.

He it was who, waging secret war upon university caste, dug his revengeful fangs into the Professor's naked soul. He it was who spotted with relentless eye all the misprints in the Professor's papers, and denounced them as enormities of ignorance in the *British Crystallographic Review*, with which is combined the *Crystal Gazetteer* and *Bulletin*. He it was who exploded de Bohun's ancient German doctrines with the recent research of horrid Dagoes, and exposed it to derision whenever he lectured to a class of more than a dozen; for his department being mixed up with commerce, there was money in it, and a few undergraduates on the

scent of the same; not so the Professor's department. Now two, now one student, sought the well of learning, and sometimes none.

On the other hand, Professor de Bohun could—and did—nourish a burning happiness in his heart to remember that the infamous B. Leader was of no lineage and had no private income at all. Nay, worse; an accent—almost a twang.

But alas! for the alloyed happiness of risen man, in whom the highest have something in them of the ape, (Poggles *General View*, Vol. II, Ch. XXII, p. 222). B. Leader himself nourished a secret burning joy in his heart; for he had found out—what the great thought was peculiar to their own circle—the dreadful story of William de Bohun and the Mullingar Diamond.

Because he loved crystals—not because he loved wealth: because the Mullingar Diamond was the largest of its yellow kind in the world, and had a flaw which was confidently reported to be due—incredible!—to a bubble, William de Bohun had, eight years before, while stopping at the Abbey as an honoured guest, pinched the Mullingar Diamond—not for a permanency, but to make a close examination of the incredible bubble. He had returned it, but already his action had got known, and some people were cold to him. The less instructed among the great whispered that he had been a famous thief in youth; the more instructed believed that his profound science had produced a momentary lapse. The Family knew, but had long forgiven him; indeed, there was nothing to forgive—they said.

Let it be added that Professor de Bohun had acquired, from so much concentrated study upon dodekahedral crys-

tals—with fatiguing excursions among the octohedrals—a pleasing habit of repeating a word, never less than three times, and sometimes six or eight.

In dress the old gentleman was careless, and, though perpetually washing, never apparently clean. However, he did shave—save for the whiskers which were the badge of his attainments in the learned world.

There was expected a third man, as young as, or younger than, Lord Galton, and of a very different and meaner kind, a certain Hamish McTaggart, who had become suddenly famous within the narrow circle of the people in the know, because the Prime Minister, upon reading an article of his upon Protection had said—in the full hearing of the very narrow circle—“This is the only man on Protection whom I really understand.” The article had appeared by the order of McTaggart’s master in *The Howl*, whence it may be rightly assumed that McTaggart knew no more of economics than would a warthog of Botticelli. Hence the lucid style which the Prime Minister had saluted with such discovering joy.

His argument had been very simple. If you prevent things coming in to the sacred Island, Albion, the Albionese will have to make these things for themselves, and that means more employment, doesn’t it? The truth had struck the Prime Minister with far more effect thus set down in clean print, than when he had heard it, as he had heard it a thousand times, from the proprietor of *The Howl*, whom he had himself so rightly ennobled.

Therefore was Hamish McTaggart now glowing with a vivid, though, alas! restricted fame.

He himself was getting heartily tired of it. It had halved

his income—that is, it had brought it down below five hundred pounds a year. No one would print him except upon the subject of Protection, and he had to write in the way that was really understood. And he was allowed to write only in those papers peculiar to the little inner circle with the little inner circulation corresponding—and there's no money in that! When he wanted to write about tigers, and get his expenses paid free to the East and a lump sum—a job he would have got for the asking two years before, when he wrote by the thousand words, to order, just after leaving the University—he was asked what on earth he knew about it? Tigers! And was bundled back to Protection.

Therefore was his future black; but in the little circle he was a sort of lion. Victoria Mosel was always talking of him; Marjorie was eager to see him once and then to discard his company for ever; Lady Bolter, full of the intellectual Victorian time, wanted to be able to say that she had been in the same room with a man of whom the Prime Minister himself had said that he was the only man whose writing he really understood. The Home Secretary had met him once or twice in other people's houses; Marjorie herself and her aunt were the only two for whom he was still quite a stranger.

"What train is he coming by?" said Tommy Galton, sunk into a deep chair.

The Home Secretary looked at his watch, then at the clock, noted they did not correspond, frowned, and said he'd be here any time.

"I'll give you evens," said Victoria Mosel, "that he calls you Dee Boe Hunn."

"Done!" said Tommy Galton, putting up a finger.



*Victoria Mosel lays odds on Mr. McTaggart's
saying "Dee-Boe-Hunn."*

"Bradburys?" said Vic, sucking a pencil. "Gimme a bit o' paper."

Tommy Galton wrote on his cuff. "That'll do," he said.

"I often wish," bleated Aunt Amelia, "that you young people could have met John Bright. I was only in the schoolroom, of course, but my dear father had *no* scruples in——"

She was not allowed to go on.

"We can't all sit here kicking our heels till he's kind enough to parade," said Marjorie, with girlish simplicity.

"No one wants you to," said Vic, delicately tearing off the last cigarette like a plaster, and sticking in another one. "I'm clamped down. Me for Hamish!"

The Professor suddenly gave tongue. His exceedingly pale old eyes were wide open, and his foolish mouth almost as wide.

"Oh, I think it'll be exceedingly interesting—exceedingly interesting," he quavered. "Exceedingly interesting to meet one of the new generation of . . . shall we say, ah! journalists? Yes, journalists. . . . Journalists."

"Yes, Bill," replied young Galton. "We'll say journalists." Marjorie yawned and stretched.

"Well, I'm not going to wait any longer," she said, when the buzz of a motor was heard on the gravel outside, the approach of middle-class feet, the door solemnly thrown open as for a dancing bear, and the unfortunate McTaggart appeared, his name preceding him.

The Home Secretary, who had preserved some of the traditions, unfolded himself painfully from his chair and stood

up, greeting McTaggart with the wan smile of the public man.

"Good evening, Mr. de Bohun." And behold! he pronounced it *Deboon*. With the business-like rapidity that became her so well, Victoria Mosel handed a crushed ball of three one-pound notes undemonstratively to Tom Galton, who stretched forward to take it and elaborately crossed out the note on his cuff.

Young McTaggart stood there a moment, not daring to sit down, suffering great torture. Nor did any of the company relieve it, though Aunt Amelia, to do her justice, did tell him how glad they all were to see him, much as a spokesman for the Divinities might welcome any clod.

The poor devil was out of place. He did not know why he had come; he had come because he was pressed, because he had nothing else to do, because he was lonely, because he had heard of Paulings and wanted to see it, because he thought such a visit to such a house might improve his prospects; and now that he was here, he wished it had never been built.

He was never at his ease with his social superiors. His father and grandfather had been mere soldiers; his great-grandfather one of Nelson's captains; *his* father again a very small laird in Ayrshire—but one had to go back as far as that to get to gentility. He dressed awkwardly, and he knew it. He never seemed to know quite where to put the hands and feet at the extremities of his uncouth frame. He also had a rather irritating trick of never looking anybody in the face. It was nervousness, and came of writing too much. He was, I regret to say, terrified of women, but especially of Ladies; and he had already spent the first hours

of his exile in wondering why on earth he had allowed himself to be over-persuaded and had come.

.
So much for the tea table and those that sat round it. The Home Secretary, damnably full of courtesy but rather silent, sat helpless; Victoria Mosel still stood by the fire surveying them all—and particularly McTaggart—not unsaturnine for the others, but with a singular touch of kindness in her slits of eyes for the embarrassed boy. Then she recovered the firm pressure of her lips, emphasised by the drooping cigarette, and the others looked on inanely or surlily, according as God had made them.

.
If you think I am going to describe to you in any detail how they passed their time between tea and dinner, you are mistaken. Some books are written like that, and there is an art of making them readable. I have it not.

To action, therefore—to the Emerald!

Chapter Three

T WAS that same Friday night, and about 9.55 by the clock. The men had just come in from the dining-room. They had been warned that the housekeeper, Mrs. Bankes (fear nothing—you will never meet her again) had commandeered the drawing-room. They were not allowed to go back there, for even now the belated serfs were spreading, under Mrs. Bankes' eye, large dingy cloths over the chairs and tables against the early sweep of the morrow.

The Home Secretary had no choice but to shepherd them into the somewhat forlorn, hardly used West Room. A good fire had been ordered. He trusted humbly in God that the parrot Attaboy, securely covered in its black cage cloth, could utter no unseemly Attaboy cry. If it did—well, if it did, Tommy must laugh. After all, it was his fault if he had pulled a horse.

The men crawled in. McTaggart, being by far the meanest, was compelled—in an agony—to go first. Next the Professor slid; after him with sullen assurance Tom Galton. And the great statesman filed in last, as host and chief, and shut the door with all the discretion of the Front Bench and fourteen years of Westminster.

Marjorie was standing on the polar-bear skin rug by the fire, near that fierce grinning head, those ironical teeth, holding the emerald—the brooch—in her open hand; showing it to Victoria, who peered at it cynically enough. She had

already heard the story of it—for the third time in two weeks, and for the three hundred and fifty-first in her life—she knew it to be false, and she dreaded to hear again the myth of the diplomat, the old Bohunian lie. But a good heart thumped behind that bony breast and Victoria Mosel spared the child.

With this coming in of a new audience, Marjorie summoned them at once, and they crowded round in obedience to that summons; and once more to the listening earth she told—in her innocence!—the largesse of Catherine the Great to her ancestor the diplomat, in whom she firmly believed.

Lord Galton looked at the jewel with a sort of animosity, as much as to say, "Put on no suspicious airs with me!" McTaggart tittered at it with a nervous smile, as though he liked it well enough, but was rather frightened of it; the Professor glared it down with an expert's pose. The three men stood thus, bunched round their young hostess, touching shoulders, while Marjorie continued her story of the de Bohun mission to the great Empress, adding sundry other details which in her judgment gave a heightened historical value to the gem.

Then the gods struck.

What she did, or how she did it, she never remembered. She felt a sharp shoot in her finger: she should have known it was due to the ill-calculated length of the pin. She said to herself—but in her heart she did not believe it—that some one had jogged her elbow. Anyhow, the Emerald of Catherine the Great jerked out suddenly and fell from her palm, making no noise. It must have fallen upon the bear-skin at her feet, where a standard electric light upon a little table near at hand happened to cast a shadow. She gave a

startled cry, and at once the three men were on their knees—yes, even the old Professor—groping in the fur.

They were longer at their groping than one might have thought. The object was small, but not so small as all that. It was flat, heavy, metallic: it could not have rolled. It must be within a few inches, or a foot at the most, of the place on which its proprietress had stood.

Unfortunately she moved, and in that movement no one could remember, to half a foot or so, exactly where it should have lain. While the three men still groped, and the impatient Marjorie tapped with her foot in the suspense of it, the unfortunate McTaggart cried excitedly, "I've got it!"

Lord Galton at once jumped up, relieved; the Professor also extended upwards—less smartly; but when they had risen McTaggart was still on his knees. Then with his face peering into the fur of the bearskin, he added, "No! It's a splinter of coal,"—and he threw that fragment into the fire and continued to rummage.

The Professor and Lord Galton looked at each other. They hesitated whether to go down again; they thought it better to leave it to McTaggart. Poor McTaggart thus remained in the abject attitude to which he had now been subjected for two minutes or more, becoming increasingly convinced that something terrible had happened. . . . He could not conceive why he should not put his hand upon the thing. . . . But it was not there. . . . At last, flushed, more disordered than ever, he pressed the fingers of his left hand upon the floor and stood upright. He was a little blown.

"I can't find it!" he said.

"You *must* find it!" said Marjorie sharply. Then, re-

remembering herself, she looked at the two who were her equals and cousins and she said:

"One of you must find it! It can't be lost! Nonsense. . . . Look here, stand back!" She pushed her poor old aunt, who was peering about in a futile fashion. She enlarged the circle, and then said again:

"Now then, you must find it! Look here, I'll find it." They went down again reluctantly, and she herself sank suddenly to her knees and helped the group.

But they looked in vain. They separated the hair of the rug carefully, they lifted it up pettily, edge by edge, and looked beneath. They pressed upon it with their palms to see whether they could not find a lump. Then they took the poor beast up and shook him savagely. But he yielded no emerald. It was gone.

When at last they all rose again—appalled, for the moment silent—Marjorie was as white as the skin upon which she trod.

"It can't be lost," she said again, bitterly. "I say, it *can't* be lost."

But lost it was.

"Father," she said angrily. "Do come and look!"

The Home Secretary reluctantly hoisted himself from his chair with a secret groan, shuffled up to the place, and looked down at the rug in a refined manner.

"Look for it, father! Do look for it! Come, it can't be lost!"

Painfully but obediently the Home Secretary went down on his knees in his turn and groped about, with far less chance than any other man would have had, of laying his hand upon the stone. He drew blank, as the others had,

and rose with more difficulty, McTaggart helping him; he shuffled back, and sank again into his chair.

"Well, well, well!" he said. "Well! Well!"

There were tears in Marjorie's eyes—which was a weakness in one so born and in such a place, but she could hardly keep them back. They were tears as much of anger as of anything else. Upon Victoria Mosel's face—somewhat apart, and smiling awfully at the bunch of them—there was a look you could not see through. But upon the face of each of the three men who had been first down upon their knees—not upon the face of the Home Secretary—was now drawn an indefinable veil, as of instinctive protection against a censorious world.

It had dawned upon each of them, in varying degrees of rapidity, that *he* was possibly suspect.

It had flashed first upon the lordlet. He lived and breathed in an air of challenge. It would not have surprised him if he had seen some day on a glaring sky sign flaming up large over Piccadilly Circus and winking in and out to compel the eye: "Attaboy? Who pulled Attaboy? Tommy Galton!"

The Professor got the message to his brain about a quarter of a minute later. He very nearly spoke—but he caught the words in time. The Mullingar Diamond oppressed him: all the world pointed a finger at him, and the air was full of demoniac whispers: "Mullingar! Mullingar!"

And as for the miserable McTaggart, he was already such a worm in his own eyes among these exalted folk that he thought his poverty might alone have him arrested that very night. It struck him with a pang that, in his innocence, he had remained there on his knees long after the others had

risen. Then a new shaft stabbed him. Ingenuous, he had dug his own grave! They would interpret that cry, "I've found it!" as the sudden shock of a real discovery: for him there sounded dully all around, "Ar-r-rest that mon!"—and he was nearly sick.

So there they stood—three men, none of whom had any idea what had happened, and each well convinced that he was the suspect who must fight it out sooner or later: each at the same time firmly believing that one of the other two was the culprit. In Marjorie's pure mind there spread a growing certitude that they were all of them guilty, all of them, and that each of them had the emerald in his pocket—yet were there not three emeralds but one emerald. At least, that was how it felt. But within the soul of the Home Secretary—if I might so call it—there was a strong sense of botheration and of wishing the beastly thing had never happened.

Under the keen inward light of Victoria Mosel's intelligence, standing apart, a fascinating problem was being discussed. She was delighted. It would occupy her for days. It was just what she liked.

In all that circle of heads, showing in different degrees—Victoria's least of all—the mood of the mind through some transfiguration of the face, each silent for the moment, only one head stood frankly stamped with a fierce joy. It was the head of the polar bear.

If he could have spoken he might—or he might not—have told them. It might have amused him more to keep them in suspense. His great red grinning open mouth and shining teeth were full of joy. His fierce glass eyes glared upon them mischievously. It was almost worth while being shot

and skinned for such a revenge as this! *He knew where the emerald was.* . . . It was in his right ear.

They had taken him and shaken him with great indignity, but they had foolishly taken him up by the hind legs. One should never take a polar bear up in that way, especially when it is a bear who has been a prince in his own country of keen wind, low shining sun, and little dancing seas against the ice. They had shaken him, but they had shaken—oh, shame!—upside down, and the more they had shaken him, the more firmly had they wedged the emerald in his right ear, where it so snugly lay.

He could have told them, and I have hastened to tell you. Then where, you ask me, does the detective fun come in?

You shall see!

.

Far in the Eastern Wing where, mured in stone
 Arrived at by a passage cold that ran
 Along the North o' the House, and barred with iron
 As to its windows: also by a door
 Which leads from the considerable room
 Wherein are great receptions held at Paulings
 [An Antrum gaunt, abandoned, having only
 Upon its walls the Oils of dead de Bohuns
 (Pronounced Deboons) and sundry dusty sofas:
 The Room grandiloquently named the Ballroom],
 There stand the Servants' Quarters. It is there,
 That, ruled by their dread Queen, the Housekeeper,
 And by her Coadjutor King, the Butler,
 The serfs Boonesque repose. The Cook, the Chauffeur,
 The Kitchen Maids, the Footmen, and the Boy:
 And Lord! how many others! These that night—

That winter night of doom—held high discourse,
Upon the EMERALD. Samuel had heard
(While bearing in the tray of drinks, himself
Arrayed in livery) how its disappearance
Had flummoxed all the Toffs. "You bet your breeches!"
Said he, to either sex, indifferent
And indiscriminate. "You bet your breeches!
Whoever's pinched it 's got to cough it up!
The Boss, he ain't Home Secretary, not
For nothing!" and with that his tongue was still.
Then spake young Gwendoline, the Tweeny Maid,
"I pity Him or 'Er as 'as it!" Words
Which, when she had them spoken, froze their souls—
Nor none more starkly than the Second Housemaid's,
Unless it were the Boy's—and so to Bed.

Chapter Four

 HE majestic poise of the Nordic blood is nowhere seen in greater perfection than in that crown of our civilization, a modest English Country House. Here is there no class consciousness, here is there no class war. Each is in his or her own place, and there is peace through order.

To consider only the servile portion of the establishment: the Butler has his own dignity, and the various other males—upon whose titles I am a little shaky—have theirs. So the Females of the species: the Cook cooks; the Kitchen Attendants attend the kitchen; the Nurse nurses. So with the external squad: the Groom grooms; the Gardener and all his Assistants garden. With regularity and zeal the Footmen footle. The mere Maids go maidenly about their tasks. Below these specialised functionaries, for which Our Race is famous, comes one who may be regarded indifferently as the foundation of the fabric or the last rung of the ladder, and who is known as the Boy. On him the petty, unorganised, lesser work devolves, for which his Superiors are indeed responsible, but the mere brute labour of which is his alone.

Thus it is the Boy who blacks the boots, fills all the coal scuttles and carries them about, lays the fires and lights them, polishes the knives, the silver plate—the silver itself, when there is any—and the antique pewter; washes up the dishes of the supper below stairs, cleans the door knobs and bell handles; pulls up the blinds; pulls back the curtains



The Boy Ethelbert in Captivity.

of the ground floor. Notably it is he also who conveys to the Upper Servants—who then shall have risen from slumber—the numbers of the bells that have sounded. It is he who opens the windows when they should be shut, and shuts them when they should be open—so far at least as the early hours are concerned, for when the Great are about this function is performed by a young man in uniform. It is the Boy who lays out the morning post, sets the newspapers in order—therein discovering the odds—lets out the little dog—or dogs—and after some few other trifling tasks accomplished, brushes and carefully folds the clothes of the male guests and lays them out where stronger and older men shall carry them up, each parcel to its room, and for that service receive an ultimate reward. It is the Boy who carries up the boots themselves—for these are defiling to the fingers!—and it is the Boy—mark you: this is essential to the tale, you must not miss it—it is *the Boy who picks up the rugs and shakes them*, room after room, a ritual preparatory to the settling of great clouds of dust, which, shortly after, not the Boy but a Maid brings down to the rugs again with feathery instruments and devastating cloths.

Hence it was that the Boy—Ethelbert by his full baptismal name, but in the daily, Bert—before yet the wintry dawn was more than grey on that Saturday in January, whistling gaily at his task, was holding the polar bear up by its *forepaws* and shaking it, as in duty bound.

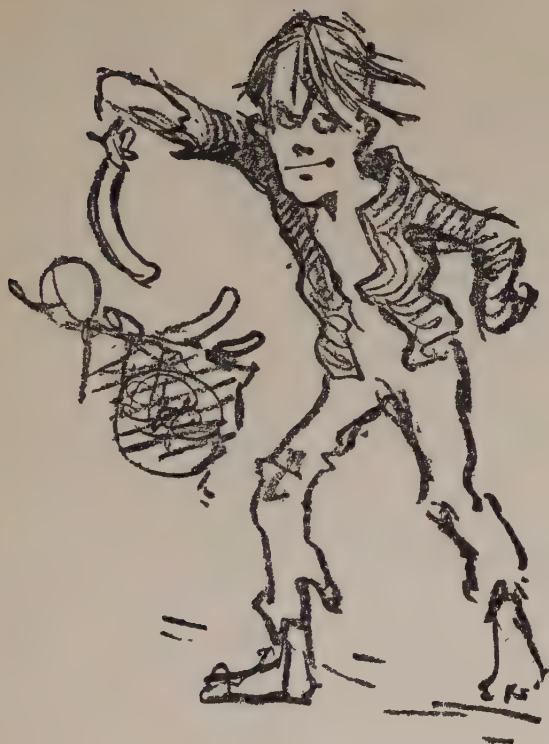
His heart was gay, for he was redeemed.

Not so long since, this same Ethelbert had (alas!) in company with youths of his own age and a little more, not yet free from the trammels of elementary education, purloined from a shop certain fruits: two bananas.

The Deed might have appeared upon his record at Scotland Yard and dogged him through life, for he was already eight years of age and knew full well the wickedness of his act. He had been spared by the noble elasticity of the English Common Law. His sobbing widowed mother had seen, indeed, the shadow of the police across her threshold, and Ethelbert had stood in the Felons' Dock before the dud parliamentary lawyer who had got the local stipendiary job. But our Magistracy—especially that of the Stipendiary Sort—is famous throughout the whole world for its merciful wisdom. Young Bert had escaped imprisonment, as having been led away by his senior Charlie Gasket, who was nearly ten.

He had, I say, been saved; but the memory of the peril had burnt into his soul. And now, though he was nearly fifteen years of age, the incident still stood out the sharpest of his memories. It was known to his lord the Butler—perhaps to his Master—but to no others. He had been taken into the Great House in spite of it all, because his father had worked upon the estate. Therefore, I say, did Ethelbert feel himself redeemed. But he trembled still at the apparatus of National Justice.

In the innocence of youth he whistled gently to himself. His other work was done; this performed, he had but now to settle the last rug, the Polar Bear, and then to rouse his superiors in the hierarchy below stairs, to lay their breakfast out and to attend thereon as minister. So shook he perfunctorily the Arctic Ursine Fleece, the Hyperborean Candour, when he heard something fall sharply at his feet. He even caught a flash of it as it fell. He saw it issuing from that ear of Thule which would hear no more; he saw it slid-



*The Boy Ethelbert untouched by
Civilisation.*

ing down the whiteness of the hair and gleaming dully in the candlelight upon the polished wood of the flooring.

There was no mistake. It was *IT*. It was that pledge of respect and esteem which the ever-memorable Catherine, Empress of All the Russias, had bestowed three lives ago upon the stalwart Bones. It was the heirloom of that noble House of de Bohun which Ethelbert served. It was the Stone on which he had heard all the domestics of the house inflamed in the last hours of the previous evening.

There is an instinct planted in man by Mr. Darwin, which impels him to pick up a thing, anything dropped. That instinct Ethelbert obeyed. The act was half unconscious, immediate; he had slipped the Emerald into his pocket and was already off with a candle in one hand and the other in a side pocket, fondling the stone. He was off down the long stone corridor which led along the north of the house towards the offices; and as he went his mind was full of some vague intention to hand over the treasure-trove to those in authority—in good time.

But even as he thus went up by the dim candlelight in the cold dawn, along that prison-like perspective of iron-barred windows and whitewash, with stone flags ringing to his feet, a vision of judgment arose within him. His teeth chattered at the memory of the police.

Ethelbert, that product of no more than an elementary education, had received some general outline of the world from cinemas and from police reports, which that same education enabled him to read in the more widely circulated Sunday papers.

He could not have told you that society was organized to the advantage of circles to which he did not belong, and

to the disadvantage of his own; but he did know that this piece of green glass in its leaden-coloured setting of hideous lines would sell for a sum that would free him from servitude for ever. He also knew that to be found possessed of it would involve a far worse servitude; a servitude not to the Gentry but to the Force, and lasting, one way or another, the whole of his life. He knew that such servitude was torture. The people of his world knew all those things. Therefore did not the emerald represent to Ethelbert immediate wealth so much as a vision of confinement alone in a small mechanical cell; upon release, a life-long chain binding him as an informer and spy over whom further imprisonment should hang at will; a crushing and overwhelming tyranny; and perhaps at last a secret and abominable death. Of all these things had young Bert's mind been full from very early years, for all these things still haunt the distorted fancy of the poor.

He saw himself presenting with trembling hand this Thing of Power, this Emerald, to his Emperor the Butler; he imagined a first awful and immediate trial at the hands of that Justiciar, and later an overwhelming sentence from the Master himself. He heard the key turning in the door of his room; he saw himself a gibbering prisoner therein; he heard the voices of the Inspector and his accompanying Sergeant; he felt the gyves upon his wrist.

All this in the few seconds between the West Room of Paulings and the offices built out of the extreme east.

So was Ethelbert's mind made up. For his good angel, failing to penetrate the first thick skin of stupidity and to suggest the simple delivery of the gem to his superiors, at

any rate got through the second skin and suggested a second best.

He had the brushing of the clothes. He would put it into the pocket of some one of the guests, and then he could breathe freely.

Which guest should it be? No one was yet astir; he was free to choose. There was a minute or two before the clock would strike the half hour and bid him summon the earliest riser—after himself—the kitchen-maid. Her name, Kathleen Parkinson, I take the liberty of giving you, although she will appear no more in these pages.

There lay the three little piles of clothes, to be carefully brushed and folded up by himself, within the next half hour, and among them how could a youth of romantic genius hesitate? Did not every novelette, every Sunday paper, every cinema, point with unerring finger to the lord? Are not lords and jewels made one for the other, like love and laughter, or politics and stocks and shares? The lord could not but be the recipient of the emerald, and when he should have received it, who fitter than he to deal with such trifles? Bert could see him in his mind's eye, and hear him in his mind's ear, strolling up to the Master of the House and saying, in that airy accent which had always so astonished him in the wealthy:

"Oh, I say, Humph, I found the bloody thing this morning and picked it up—what?"

Now into which pocket of Lord Galton's quiet blue suit should it go? Into the right-hand trousers pocket; for therein, as Bert knew by fruitful search, his lordship carried loose change. From the waistcoat it might fall out. In the coat pockets it might lurk for long without being

found; in Lord Galton's right-hand trousers pocket, therefore, did the emerald go, to the full depth thereof. The garment was folded again very neatly. And all was well.

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In the fulness of time, the sun being already risen—yes, for an hour or more—one of those older young domestics of whom I have spoken bore up a parcel of clothes and a can of hot water to Lord Galton's door. All the ritual of these palaces was gone through. The socks were turned inside out, the shirt laid out like a corpse in its shroud, the pile of brushed and folded clothes set upon a chair, the fire lit—as though the room were not already stifling with a hot-air machine; the window opened wider, as though the piercing air had not already started a draught which had fought with the hot air all night long. The under-upper servant glided away, and Lord Galton got out of bed and shaved and washed and dressed; considering in his mind what all others woke to consider in that same house on that same morning, but especially the Fated Three: the Emerald.

He looked at his watch; it was a quarter past nine. He stood gazing out of the window at the frosty mist on the damp gaunt trees of the park, and tried to estimate how he really stood in the minds of those about him.

Who would believe that he knew nothing of the stone? Which of them had heard—several of them, he knew—which of them *believed* that story about Attaboy? Certainly his host, almost certainly Vic—she knew everything. He was not quite certain that she had not meant to rag him about it in something she had said during the day before. She would not misunderstand, but she knew about it.

Did that damned greasy fellow the journalist know? He

doubted it; they never did know the things that counted. And as for the Don, he might as well have suspected the first imbecile in the County Asylum.

Marjorie did not know; he was pretty sure of that by her way to him. But still . . . it was known enough; it was known to two. . . . After all, what was pulling a horse, and what had it to do with pinching emeralds, anyhow? . . . Yet . . . yet . . . he could not leave Paulings till it was cleared up. . . . If the damned thing turned up in town in some receiver's shop they might connect it with him. . . . He was glad he hadn't brought a man. . . . No, he must stay till it was cleared up. It was a damned nuisance. They were getting up a party on Sunday night at the Posts. There was to be a rich young fool from Ireland whom they would all play with. Those occasions were not so common nowadays. But he must sacrifice it. He must stay on.

He made his decision; he slowly picked up the small change off his dressing table and shuffled it into his trousers pocket. Then he mechanically followed it with his hand, and found something that was not a coin. . . .

At first he had the grotesque idea that he was handling a pebble, though how it could have got there he could not conceive. Then a matchbox, for it was smooth and cold. . . . When he pulled it out and saw what it was, his whole mind went through a violent shock of revulsion.

He was so sickened, strong as he was, that he had to sit down and recover himself. And as he so sat, he fixed the dreadful thing with his eye, holding it there between the fingers of his right hand, unmoving.

Now indeed was a resolution to be taken!

At first his mind would not work. A man possessed of a thing, no matter what he does with it, carries his communications about with him, leaves traces about of his possession. If he threw it out of the window, it would be found within the radius of such a throw. There was nowhere in the room where he would dare to hide it. If he dropped it as he went downstairs, a servant might pass and find it within a minute, connecting him with what was so found.

Give it back himself he dared not. That would mean, "Poor Tommy! He gave way, but he did the honest thing in the end." He would be branded for life. Attaboy was enough, without that.

At first the easiest course lured him; to say nothing; to keep it upon his person until everything had blown over; then to take it up with him to town. . . . Then? . . . He could not help remembering how Alfred had told him about his uncle and the cutting establishment in Amsterdam. It was all mixed up with the committee for inquiring into the Meldon business when there was that trouble in Parliament a few years before. . . . It seemed that one could have a stone cut and get it back unrecognisable. . . . Then he thrust the thought out of his mind and shuddered a little at the danger.

But if he kept it, where should he put it? Where could he put it so as to be certain during the night—to be *absolutely* certain—that no one could find it with him or near him? What if he should fall faint or ill? What if . . . No, there was only one thing to be done. He must pass it on. No matter what tale he told—even if he told the



Lord Galton discovers the Emerald.

truth—to appear with it in his possession and to make an explanation was to damn himself finally, and that just at the moment his half-damnation on the turf was beginning to be forgotten. . . . He must pass it on. . . . He must pass it on.

There was one obvious repository; an aged fool of that profession whose incompetence is stamped upon them; a native dupe. It should go into the pocket of his distinguished cousin, the Professor; it should pass into the unwitting possession of the expert on dodekahedral crystals. His mind thus decided, he was half at peace.

Lord Galton went down to breakfast. He found his host already at the table. The others came in gradually, and no one talked of the stone; nor upon anything else to speak of—for of the stone everyone was thinking.

It was, naturally, the learned cousin, the Professor, who first put in the word that should not have been spoken. He did it somewhere about the jam, and when the Home Secretary was already feeling the need for a pipe. Perhaps food had strengthened him. He piped up in his quavering voice:

“Ah! Any news about the emerald, Humphrey? Any news this morning about the emerald? About the emerald? . . . the emerald? . . . the emerald?”

There is a natural sequence in fools, as in all others of God's creatures. Aunt Amelia came in a good second.

“Oh, yes, Humphrey,” she bleated, in that woolly-mutton voice which fitted her as does sodden mist a marshy formless hill. “Is there any news about the emerald?”

“There is hardly likely to be, Amelia,” said her brother,

as tartly as he could be got to say anything, for long years of suave politician's make-believe had untartled his tongue.

"I thought," said Aunt Amelia in self-defense, "that some servant might have found it and told you."

"Well, they have not," said her brother, shortly; and there was silence.

The journalist opened his mouth—which he should not have done—and began rather too loudly, and in too high a pitch:

"What I think, you know . . ." and then stopped suddenly—which put him in no better case.

What Victoria Mosel would have said nobody knew, for she took her breakfast in bed—always. But Marjorie had come down in the midst of this, and spoke sharply. She had slept little and her temper was on edge.

"Oh, that's enough about the emerald!" she said. "What's the good of talking of it *now*?" Then she gave one sweeping look around, like a searchlight trying to spot a boat, and betook herself to the jam.

The one who said nothing was the young racing man with the emerald in his trousers pocket. He was not sure of it—he touched its pin point two or three times furtively to make certain the gem had not dropped out; and then he began, by way of clearing the air, to talk to the learned Professor about indifferent things.

But these indifferent things had a purport in them. For first he talked of the University, then of that degraded College, St. Filbert's, and so worked things round to the infamous B. Leader, and that fairly started his companion off—as Lord Galton had intended he should be started.

The old Don was still at it when they got up from the breakfast table. He was shepherded—though he did not know that he was being shepherded—by the younger man, out into the hall, helped into his rusty overcoat, led out through the glass doors into the park, and there did Lord Galton patiently listen to his academic victim for something over a quarter of an hour, as they walked side by side up the swept gravel to the very far end of the avenue, and then turned back again towards the house.

Long before they thus faced about, the learned cousin's mind was a thousand miles away from reality. The harangue which poured forth against the infamous B. Leader needed but little sympathetic jogging—a word here and there—from his companion. His soul was not in his body. You might have stuck a pin into him, and he would not have felt it; and Lord Galton, who knew men nearly as well as he knew horses—at least on the side of their weaknesses—felt secure that the moment had come. And as he leaned forward, sympathetically close to the left side of his companion, he gently dropped into the loose, wrinkled side pocket of the rusty overcoat that perilous gem, and felt as though he had cast off a garment of lead.

The expert in dodekahedral crystals still poured out unceasingly and shrilly his grievance, with many a "Would you believe it?" and "If you please!" and "Then he actually wrote to the Society at Berne," and so on; and Lord Galton, almost grateful in the new lightness of his heart, applauded heartily and loudly marvelled that the Society at Berne did not drum Leader out of their ranks with every mark of infamy.

"So," he thought, as they came into the house again—the quavering voice of the Crystallographer still more emphatic within four walls—"salvation comes with a little intelligence, a little decision, and a little opportunity."

He helped the old fool out of his overcoat; hung it up for him on a peg, and saw its owner go shambling off to his books.

Lord Galton was pleased with himself; he saw his way fairly straight before him, but he would do nothing hastily . . . which might flurry the head of the house. . . . It would be a wise and a small risk, to bide his time. He would bide it till the noon post had come in, until his host had looked at his letters. Then only would he take the next step in his programme. He sauntered out again into the Park, where he would feel the strain of waiting less, with a walk to occupy him. He looked back over his shoulder when he had got round towards the lodge, and saw for one moment through the window of the library his aged relative pottering among the shelves. He was safe till lunch. And Lord Galton, though all alone, smiled.

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The young man walked briskly for a couple of miles, thinking clearly and concisely. He came back to Paulings through the mill gate, up by the stables, walking strongly and well. He knew exactly what he had to do.

He met one of the servants, and asked where Mr. de Bohun might be, and was told he was in the garage; sought him there, and found him giving orders about a repair, and trying—unsuccessfully—to understand whether the proud chauffeur were lying or no.

He went straight up to his cousin, who turned round at hearing his step, and said in a very low voice, and quickly:

"Let me see you in your study alone for a moment. It is urgent!"

And the Home Secretary, glancing up hurriedly with a half-frightened look, said, "Yes? Certainly! Come."

Chapter Five

ORD GALTON stood by the Home Secretary in his study, looked round suddenly, and said, "May I lock the door?" locked it without leave and then came back and began talking.

The young fellow talked as impressively as ever he had talked when he was giving instructions to a jockey, or rather, to the go-between who took the risk. He knew how to talk, as do most men who are successful in giving instructions to jockeys. His sentences came, weighty, short, decisive, and each had its effect. Men said he would have done well in the House of Commons, but the men who have said that do not know the House of Commons. Yes, he would have done well in the House of Commons: not by oratory, but by what I may call the Attaboy side of his character. He began:

"Humphrey, I'm going to tell you about the emerald. I think I know where it is."

The Home Secretary looked up, startled; but he did not interrupt.

"I want to begin by saying that I know I am myself under suspicion."

"Oh, my dear Tommy," began his unfortunate host. But the younger man put up a hand like a slab of stone.

"No," he said. "There's no time to be wasted, and we must have things absolutely clear. One of us three must have got that brooch. No doubt we are all under sus-

picion—but I know why *I* am under suspicion. People say I pulled a horse.” Again the Home Secretary would have interrupted, but the heavy hand made an impatient gesture, and again he checked himself. “Marjorie mayn’t believe it, and of course that old fool of a Cousin Bill hasn’t heard of it; and as for that journalist fellow McTibbert, or whatever his name is, he may or may not have; I don’t care. But anyhow, *you* know it. *You’ve* heard all about it!”

“But, my dear Tommy,” broke in the Home Secretary, lying eagerly and almost with affection, “I don’t believe it. Believe me, I don’t believe it. Do you suppose,” he added with beautiful tact, “that if I believed it I’d have you here at Paulings?”

Lord Galton just showed at the muscles of the mouth what a fool he thought the man. He went on undisturbed.

“It’s nothing to do with the value of the lie—they haven’t turned me out of the Posts, for that matter; nor warned me off. But the point is, the story has gone the rounds. A man that would cheat would steal. Also *you* know I’m on the rocks, and therefore I’m under suspicion. Now we’re all three under suspicion, as I say. That old ass, Cousin Bill, got mixed up with the Mullingar Diamond years ago—too much of a fool to pinch it for selling; wanted to look at it through one of his contraptions. Anyhow, he can’t keep his hands off crystals. And an emerald’s a crystal.”

“Is it?” asked the Head of the Family with great interest.

“I think so—I don’t know,” said Galton impatiently. “Anyhow, it’s a jewel, a precious stone—what?”

"Oh, yes! It's a jewel, yes, a precious stone. Oh, yes," admitted Humphrey de Bohun.

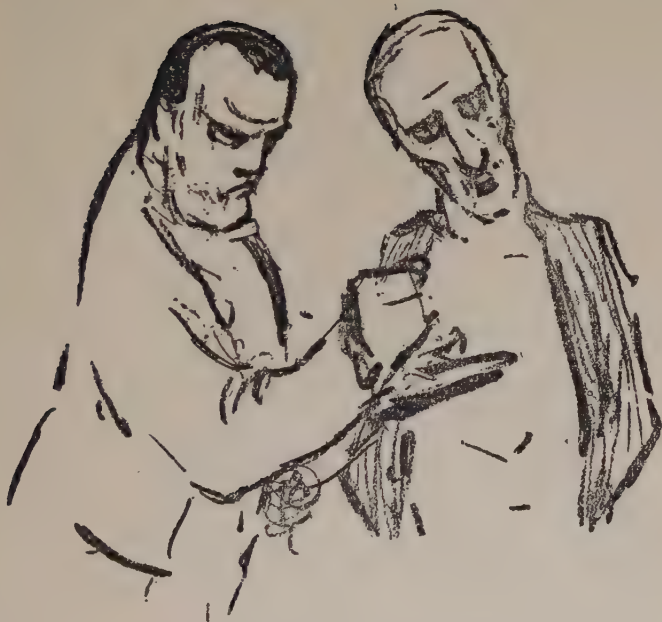
"Well then, so's a diamond. A man who'll take diamonds'll take emeralds—what? . . . Then there's that journalist fellow—he's under suspicion because he's a journalist; they're all on their uppers, and you told me yourself about the one who stole the spoons when you were at the Board of Works."

A faint smile appeared for a moment on the face of his host. It was his favourite funny story—all about a journalist who once stole some government spoons. He had told it on every occasion. He told it to journalists. But then he was never really featured by the Press.

"Now of those three," went on Lord Galton, rather more slowly, and separating his words, "the man who has got it is our miserable old family goat, Cousin Bill. . . ."

The Home Secretary started.

"Yes, I know what you'll say . . . he got the fright of his life over the Mullingar Diamond. You'd say he'd never dream of doing it in the house of the head of the family." (A dignified look passed over the features of the Chief-tain of the de Bohuns.) "Then he's such a clumsy old ass that you can't imagine him doing it so quickly. After all, it took him half an hour to fish the Mullingar Diamond out of an open drawer, and even then he left things topsyturvy. You'll say all that, and if I were just guessing I'd half agree with you. But I'm not guessing. And I tell you *he's got it*. I don't pretend to do any of this private detective work, and I've never read one of their rotten mystery stories in my life. That's how I've kept my common sense clear—men who are blown upon need their wits



*Lord Galton explains to the Home Secretary his
theory—or rather, certitude—upon the
whereabouts of the Great Emerald.*

about them. I know Bill's got it for a very simple reason—I've seen it in his hand with my own eyes. Some one told the old goat that the place to hide anything was where it would be most obvious and simple. He's got it in the left-hand pocket of that damned smelly overcoat he wears; but he's such a nervous old balmy that he can't help fingering it the whole time; and when he thinks no one's looking he pulls it half out and looks at it furtively out of the corner of his eye. Dons are always as mad as hatters. He did it three separate times while we were out walking just now. He couldn't help himself. He's too much shut up inside his own addled head to notice other people. And I'll tell you something else, which is also common sense. He won't take it out of that pocket till he's left the house. An overcoat's the only thing they don't brush or fold up, in this house; you're old-fashioned, with these things on pegs and not on marble tables. He knows that. It'll hang there on the peg till he goes away. That's the whole point of leaving it in such a place. . . . *And it's there now.* You look for it there, and you'll find it."

The Home Secretary put on his expression of gravity in the third degree—the expression with which he would meet a deputation for saving an innocent man from the gallows and gratify them with a majestic refusal.

"What you say, Tommy," he began, slowly, "is very serious. Very serious indeed. In my judgment . . ."

"Oh, look here," said Lord Galton impatiently, "cut out all that! He's not in the hall. He went off to the library, and when he gets there he strikes root. There'll be no one about—they're laying the table. Come with me, and I'll prove it."

"I hesitate . . ." began the Home Secretary. His powerful young relative, by way of reply, hooked him by the arm, unlocked the door, and marched him straight out into the hall. The ghost of what might well have been an ancestor—for we all have such things—must have mourned, if, as such things do, it had taken up its kennel in a suit of armour standing by the side of the fireplace in the hall: it would have mourned to see the head of the de Bohuns stand by while the deed was done.

Lord Galton went smartly up to the bunch of coats, plunged his hand into the left-hand pocket of that one wretched old garment, and turned it sharply inside out, so that the damning evidence should fall before his cousin's eyes. There fell out no small amount of gathered dirt, some paper torn into minute fragments, and a stub of pencil; also a rather repulsive handkerchief—nothing more. Nothing rang upon the hall floor. There was no Emerald.

Lord Galton for once did a weak thing—or a superstitious one. As though not trusting his senses, he picked the repulsive handkerchief up and shook it. But there was no emerald. Indeed, one could see and hear by the way it had fallen that there was no emerald within its large but unattractive folds. He knew that well enough before he touched the rag—but it was a forlorn hope.

It was the older man who hastily picked up these evidences, not of the Professor's dishonour, but his own, and rapidly put them back where they belonged; darting a glance over his left shoulder and sighing with relief to find that there was still no one about, not the sound of a

distant footfall, not the glide of a serf. His companion's face was darker and flushed.

"I could have sworn . . ." he opened. Then he added, murmuring, "He must have taken it away."

"I wish we hadn't . . ." began the Home Secretary, and then switched off to, "You're quite sure you saw it with your own eyes, Tommy?"

"Absolutely certain," said the young man, with a fearless steady gaze, and proud to be telling one truth at least.

The Home Secretary held his chin in his hand, stood silent for a good quarter of a minute, and then said something characteristic of his profession as a statesman. He said, "Humml!"

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What had happened?

Dear—or, if that is too familiar a term—charming reader, this is not one of the detective stories of commerce. You shall know all about it beforehand, as you have already known all about it, step by step. You shall be subjected to no torture of suspense. We will leave that to the people of our story. They were born for it.

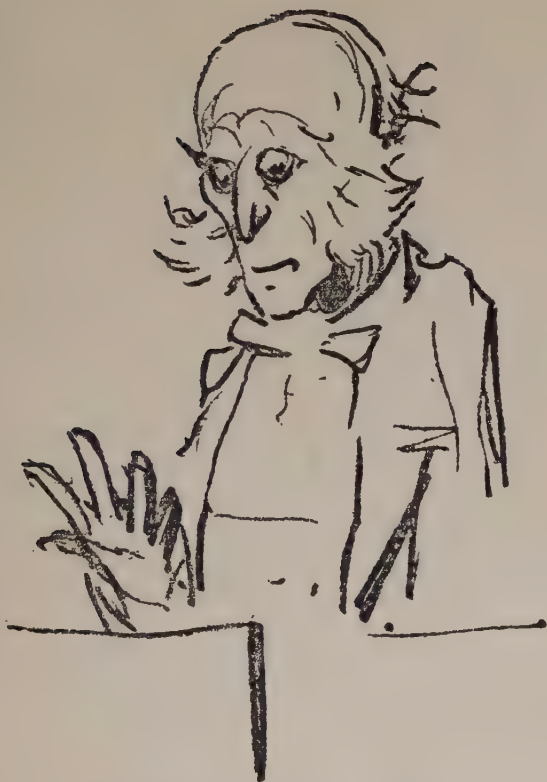
What had happened was simple enough. The Professor had gone off to the library. He wanted to make certain of the Society at Berne in the *Almanac de Gotha*. With men such as he, an obsession having cropped up has a horrid fascination for the mind and holds it. He was worrying about the exact title: whether it was *Crystallographique*, or *Crystallographische*, or *de Crystallographie*. He was determined to get it right.

He kept on talking to himself, as was his learned habit, repeating with a hideous smile the words, "Crystals . . .

ah! yes . . . crystals. . . . Crystals, eh? Crystals . . . yes. . . . Crystallograph . . . something, eh? Now then, it'll be among the books of reference, eh? Crystals. . . . Oh, what a dirty trick that was of Leader to play!" His left hand was fumbling in the left-hand pocket, where he always kept those indispensable instruments of research, his large tortoise-shell spectacles. His hand groped. He muttered the word "Berne" three times in less and less confident tones. Then the message so tardily conveyed reached his erudite brain. "Oh! . . . I've lost my spectacles!"

He never got used to the shock of losing his spectacles, though he suffered from it a dozen times a day. Each time he lost them it was all up with him; each time he went through a crisis. Here he was in the depths of the country and without eyes! There was a touch of agony in his muttering now, as came louder the words, "My spectacles, oh, ah! my spectacles . . . now where could I . . ." He bent his powerful will to the control of his, if possible, less powerful memory; he traced events back one after the other for a good three minutes, and then he remembered that he had gone out in his overcoat and had left it hanging in the hall.

He shambled out and groped in the recesses of the left-hand pocket, and there, side by side with his familiar handkerchief, the faithful companion of many days, was the feel of the rough spectacle case; it was all right, but also, what annoyed him a little, a pebble. It was natural that pebbles should get into one's pockets when one was out walking in the country; at least, he thought it was. He thought it



*The Professor gave an odd little scream like a shot
rabbit.*

went with those terrible animals called cows, and all that sort of thing. But he pulled it out mechanically, felt the prick of a pin and then gave an odd little scream, like a shot rabbit. Next (excuse him!) he rapped out a frightful oath. "My God!" cried the aged blasphemer. No less. But the violence of his emotion must have shaken his standards.

He stood there, with the emerald in the palm of his right hand, staring at it, distraught. And once more in his bewilderment he fell to repeating the name of his Creator—upon whose existence indeed, he had more than once learnedly discoursed, concluding upon the whole against it.

It is said that under the strain of very severe emotion men do things unnatural, out of themselves. And behold! Professor William de Bohun behaved for the next half hour like a whole group of characters, any one of whom you would have said he could not have thrown himself into for the world. Terror inspired him, and the tragic sense of impending doom.

It must be got rid of!

He had a mad impulse to swallow it. Luckily he restrained it in time: it was too big, its metal fastenings too angular for health; and then, there was the pin.

After he had given up the swallowing baulk, another, far more feasible, arose and formed itself more clearly. There appeared before his mind's eye a young, round naïve face, fresh to the world, an awkward figure, the whole standing out against the background of known poverty. It was the figure of McTaggart, the journalist.

A wicked glint illumined the Professor's eye.

"Oh! Baleful, hellish light, thus to suffuse
The inactive optic, wontedly so dulled,
But now with evil purpose all inflamed!"

as Milton has it in the matter of the fish-god, Dagon.

He made no excuses for himself. He recked nothing of the young man's ruin. He plunged heartily and heavily into sin. As his colleague the Professor of Pastoral Theology had once finely quoted in his Luther Commemoration Lecture, "*Si peccas pecca fortiter.*"

It is generally held by the more liberal school among theologians that man acting of his own free will is not mastered by an external evil impulse, but may well submit to it.

So it was with Cousin William on this never-to-be-forgotten occasion of his chief downfall.

A Minor Devil happened at that moment to be wandering rather emptily through Paulings, seeking what he might devour. He was hungry, poor spirit; he had eaten nothing since he had left his own place at midnight and he had got lost in the fog all morning. He had almost caught a small housemaid, but she had slipped away through the efforts of her patron saint, sweet Millicent, and left him perfectly ravenous. It was almost noon and devils are not built for fasting. Judge then his joy at coming, by pure chance, upon this evil old man. He almost jumped out of his black fiendish skin for joy to perceive the flashing violet light which surrounds, in the eyes of supernatural beings, the head of a wicked man. He spotted it first from a corner of the hall where he had just come out of a corridor. He rubbed his hands together and even flapped his

clawed wings in his excitement. He flew up to the Professor and began pouring all sorts of excellent suggestions into his ear—his left ear.

Young McTaggart could play billiards . . . the Professor had heard them say that . . . young McTaggart was probably proud of his billiards . . . he could be got to go round the table exhibiting his billiards. He would take off his coat before exhibiting his billiards. And when the coat was once off, and its owner's eye was concentrated on the billiard table . . . oh, then! . . .

The Devil, who can see through walls, gently shepherded his pupil into the little room next the library where the overflow of books was kept. That door, with horrid smile, the old conspirator opened; and there, indeed, he found the youth, looking miserably enough out of the window with his hands in his trousers pockets. He had slunk into that inhospitable fireless den in order to be free for a while from the terrors of high society.

"Ah, Mr. McTaggart, Mr. McTaggart, Mr. McTaggart!" carolled the scientist—and as he said it he opened his arms wide in a most genial gesture. "I've been looking for you everywhere!" There slyly wagging a knotted forefinger, "And I wonder if you can guess why? Eh? Why? Guess why!" Which words said, and smiling still broader, he repeated them once more three times, as was his wont, and then added: "I wonder whether you can guess why, Mr. McTaggart, whether you can guess why . . . whether you can guess why?"

The Devil was now so happy that he could hardly refrain from manifesting himself, which would have been

fatal. He whisked all round the room, jeering at McTaggart.

Poor young Mr. McTaggart! He had been all night and all that morning a most unhappy man. He exaggerated in his own mind the suspicions under which he lay. He was too innocent to believe that he shared it with such exalted beings as the lord and the Professor, of whom—though he had never heard his name—he was assured the fame to be European, and who, anyhow, was connected by blood with a cabinet minister.

The lad imagined himself watched by a thousand eyes. He dared not take his leave, and yet he was in hell during those hours he passed at Paulings. He would have been unhappy anyhow, for it was not his world; but to be within all that set and at the same time a marked criminal—for that is what he felt himself to be—was almost intolerable. How he had sprung up when the learned Ancient approached him, with those seeming kindly eyes! Ah! had McTaggart enjoyed a few more years of human experience he would have seen in those eyes such a mixture of cunning and evil joy as might have put him on his guard. But no; he thought that in his loneliness he had found a friend. Who knew?—perhaps a supporter.

The Professor's plan was simple, but McTaggart was simpler still.

"Mr. McTaggart," said the Ancient, with horrible geniality, "I hear that you are astonishing at billiards. . . . Billiards, billiards, yes, billiards. . . . Billiards. The Home Secretary was telling me, Humphrey, I mean, my cousin, my cousin Humphrey . . . the Home Secretary, yes . . . the Home Secretary was telling me that you were astonishing



*Sudden interest in the game of Billiards upon the
part of the Professor of Crystallography
to the University.*

at billiards. Now you know"—and here he went so far as to make a step sideways and seize the young man by the arm—"it is the one thing I can watch for hours . . . billiards . . . good billiards. . . . I have gone into the mechanics of the thing"—he was lying freely, and gambling, rightly, on the idea that his companion could not distinguish between Crystallography and any other science—"and it fascinates me . . . fascinates me . . . oh! fascinates me. I wonder whether—" and in a fashion which would have been crude to any other man, but to the lonely McTaggart was heavenly kindness, he urged with linked arm and long sidling crab-like step towards the billiard-room.

It was in the Professor's conception of things that when one is deceiving a fellow being one must talk the whole time. He is not the only one to suffer from that delusion.

He talked all the way to the billiard-room; he talked while McTaggart was pulling off the cloth; he talked while McTaggart was putting on the lights to see clearly on that dim January day; he talked while McTaggart was chalking his cue and thoughtfully placing the three balls in position.

The torrent of rapid words—all dealing with excellency at billiards, all squeaky—was interrupted only at one moment. It was the moment when McTaggart did what he had been expected to do—the moment when he took off his coat and threw it on the leather cushions by the side of his newly-made and slightly eccentric friend.

The sight of that coat so thrown immediately by his side, and subject to his hand, almost choked the senile conspirator with joy. But he recovered himself, and still poured out a torrent of repeated words as the young fellow walked slowly round the table, getting absorbed in a continuous break.

The Professor interrupted that verbal spate only now and then to gaze with a murderous keenness at a projected stroke and to mutter "Marvellous!" two or three times; but all the while his heart was failing him. It was not the only mean thing he had done in his life by a long chalk. He had spent the whole of his life doing nothing but mean things; but it was the first actively and perhaps dangerously wrong thing the old booby had ever dared to do: for he did not count the Mullingar Diamond—that was in the cause of Science, and in the cause of Science you can do anything.

But the Devil chose his moment for him; it was a moment of silence when young McTaggart was waiting long and breathlessly to be certain of a stroke that would bring his break over the hundred. His back was turned to the Professor; he was intent upon his play.

The old bony hand, with the gesture of one that takes rather than gives, put the emerald into a side pocket of the coat, where lay he knew not what—but in point of fact, a tobacco pouch, a pipe, a pencil, and a piece of chocolate—of all things in the world!—no longer clean. Nor had the Emerald ever been in such society before, from the day when it had started life in the splendid court of Moscovy to these last evil days of ours.

McTaggart had brought off his shot: his break was 102, and the spot and the red lay perfect for a cannon and red in the pocket.

But you exaggerate the diplomatic value of the Professor if you think that he had the wit to continue his stream of gabble after the deed was done.

It was lucky for him that he was dealing with the candour of youth, or that abrupt retreat of his from the scene of his

crime would have brought suspicion. For, his deed accomplished, he simply got up with a jerk, dropped all attention to the play, looked at his watch, muttered the time of day with an exclamation, and sidled out of the room, leaving his companion marooned . . . and with him, full of success, went the Lesser Devil.

McTaggart could do without him; he went on playing for another ten minutes or so, till the break ended, and had reached the pretty figure of 151. Then he in turn looked at his watch in his waistcoat pocket, found it would be time for luncheon in a few minutes, put up his cue, and sadly resumed his coat.

Had he been of those who smoke all day he would have pulled out his pipe, and ten to one would have found the thing lurking there next his tobacco; but he thought of the meal coming on, and much more did he think with dread that it would be breaking some mysterious etiquette of country houses if he were to smoke a pipe. He would not dare to do it till he saw some one of his betters at the same work. For the same reason, after he had heard them going towards the dining-room and had joined them, he was too nervous to put his hands in his pockets in a gesture of repose. He kept them dangling in his extreme anxiety to commit no solecism. He moved nervously about amid the sullen silence of the rest and wondered a little why the burst of geniality upon the part of the man of gems should have dried up so suddenly. For not a word more did the Professor speak to him; and all through luncheon McTaggart sat there in the same terror and the same misfortune of soul, never daring to speak some artificial word during the rare moments when anyone broke the silence.

They had not yet risen from table; he was still wondering what one did at the end of luncheon in the houses of the great—at what point one got up, whether immediately after one's host or simultaneously with one's host; whether the women went out first, as he knew they did at dinner; whether it was his duty to open the door for them—when Lord Galton pulled out his pipe, filled it deliberately enough, and lit it. After the easy manners of our happy times he slowly and with deliberation blew a cloud of smoke across the board which wreathed itself, not ungracefully, about the venerable head of Aunt Amelia. So natural an action was followed by his host, who in turn thoughtfully pulled out his own pipe and lit it, as he rose to fetch himself wine: he mixed tobacco and wine, did Humphrey de Bohun.

"Then," thought McTaggart to himself, in an agony of desire for tobacco, "it seems this kind of thing *can* be done,"—and he felt for his pipe, and pulled out his pouch.

Now there happened to be in the room at that moment an Angel. He had come to Paulings express to counteract the Devil who had been putting in such strong work on the Professor, and the Angel saved the quill driver, whom, for his poverty, he loved. For that innocent, finding something that felt like his slab of chocolate in among his tobacco, and knowing himself to be well capable of having put it there, was just about to pull it out, and was already speculating on what sort of flavour chocolate gave to Bondman—or Bondman to chocolate—when the Angel seized his wrist and pinned it. He did not know the Angel was doing this—we never know our luck—he could not have told you what happened, except that he hesitated, and being of the opposite sex, was not lost. But for the Angel, he would have



Mr. McTaggart discovers the Emerald.

pulled out the thing before them all, and said, "Hallo, what's this?" and there would have been an end of McTaggart. Instead of which the Angel, with angelic swiftness, put a thought into his head.

"Don't pull out that lump of chocolate! It will make you look a fool. The great don't eat chocolate, except out of large expensive wooden boxes with Japanese pictures outside; elaborate boxes. The rich do not carry half-broken slabs of chocolate in their pockets—still less in their tobacco pouches!"

Therefore was it that McTaggart did not take out the lump, whatever it was; he grasped a fingerful of tobacco and peered down with one eye into the recesses of the pouch. When he saw what was there, his heart stopped beating! For a moment he felt faint and giddy. . . . But the angel firmly put the pouch back again, leaving the tobacco in his fingers, and with shaking hand he filled his pipe, and with shaking hand he lit it!

What the devil?

How on earth . . . ?

The unfortunate boy actually examined his own mind to see whether he could possibly have done such a thing, and then forgotten it—have done it inadvertently. Then he thought it had fallen into his coat when Marjorie had let it drop. Then he remembered that he had not been wearing that coat, that he had been in evening dress. Then he thought that the universe was made in some way that he did not understand. He looked at his coat, and fingered it. It was all right. His mind would not work properly again until he had satisfied himself beyond a doubt not once, but many times. He allowed—through terror—too long a time

to pass lest he should seem in haste; strolled, looking as careless as he could, towards the library, looked round to make sure that no one had noticed him, leaped upstairs to his room, locked the door, took out his pouch and that which was within. He gazed at it for something like half a minute, putting it down on his dressing-table in the strong light to make sure.

There was no doubt at all. Either he was mad, or that was the emerald. He remembered some odiously vivid dreams that he had had as a child during the air raids—but he was certain this was no dream. He was McTaggart all right, a miserable young journalist against whom fate had woven some hellish plot; and there was the Emerald.

Next he tortured himself as to what he should do; obviously he must keep it upon him; he dared not secrete it anywhere. If one secretes things one can be traced. Conscience for one moment bade him go and tell his host, and risk all; but unfortunately the Angel had been called away at that very moment to tackle the Devil again, who had settled in the Vicarage; and in lack of such heavenly aid McTaggart fell, as any one of us would have fallen. He put the emerald into the inner pocket of his coat, pinned three pins round it carefully to make certain that it should not escape; and then went down with leaden heart to mix with his fellow beings and to trust to time.

Chapter Six

 HE boy Ethelbert was suffering; not from contrition—which, I need hardly tell one of your learning, is the pure sorrow for sin—but from attrition—which, I need hardly tell one of your learning, is the sorrow for sin only in so far as one considers its unpleasant consequences to oneself.

The boy Ethelbert clearly appreciated that in attempting to save himself from one danger he had run himself into another far greater. He had put a valuable jewel into a nobleman's pocket and that might be, in legal terms, for all he knew, embezzlement, malversation or even a compound and chronic felony of *malice prepense*; perhaps a misdemeanour—with which word he was familiar through the fate of an uncle of his called John.

He was in great agony, was the boy Ethelbert; in agony of that sort which youth cannot endure until it has relieved itself by communion. But how should he speak? His duty was to his natural lord, the Butler. The glorious, the remote Mr. Whaley: God of the Underworld. Should he confess to the Butler? It would be madness. Yet he must speak: he must unburden his mind.

The innocent child was not long in finding a plan. He would go to his true superior and, naming no names, mentioning no-one-like, he would give a nod as good as a wink to a blind horse, and them as understood could follow if they chose, and if they asked no questions they wouldn't

be told no lies. And mum's the word. Such, in rapid succession, were the Napoleonic thoughts of Ethelbert.

It was shortly after luncheon that he sought the room in which the dignified O.C. of the household of Paulings was wont to repose from his labours: and never more thoroughly than after luncheon.

Midday sleep is unknown to the young, at least after they are very, very young. Those of young Ethelbert's age have no use for it and cannot understand what a boon it may be to others. Foolishly, therefore, did young Ethelbert knock at the door of the holy of holies, thereby suddenly awakening the sacred being within, who jerked into a startled gasp. He pulled a handkerchief from his face, thought for a moment that the house was on fire, expected to see an angry master perhaps; was on his feet with labouring breath, purple, expectant; when there entered the Boy.

A fine and hearty curse greeted the youth and almost blasted him from the room, but what he had to say was of such moment that he just stood his ground.

"Oh, sir!" he said, "I thought I'd come and tell you. . ."

"Come and tell me what? You young devil!" roared Mr. Whaley with a lack of dignity which I should have thought impossible had I not myself once spied upon him in his more relaxed moments, when he thought that none could observe. "I've a mind to have you larroped! Damned if I don't larrop you myself!" He made a vicious dash at the Boy, who was only spurred by such terror to the arresting cry of,

"Ho, sir! The Hemerald. . . !"

"The Emerald . . ." gulped Mr. Whaley in a very changed tone. And then, almost meekly: "Well, what about the

Emerald, young Bert? What about it?" The fierceness had gone out of him altogether; he sat down. "Anyone been saying who took it?" For conscience that makes cowards of us all makes us most cowardly when we are innocent—especially in a trade with perquisites.

Ethelbert recovered some little of his composure, and there came into his eyes a look of simple cunning.

"There's some," he said, nodding mysteriously, "what might speak if they chose."

"Oh! Is there?" said Mr. Whaley. "Well then, speak, you little rat!"

"I didn't say it was me as knew," answered Ethelbert a little plaintively. "But don't you think, sir, that when the clothes are brushed and all, him as brushes finds out what's in the pockets—yes" (mysteriously) "even in them of the 'ighest?"

"'Oo'd be fool enough to leave such a thing in their pocket?" said Mr. Whaley contemptuously. "And 'oo do you mean by the 'ighest?"

Ethelbert nodded with a superior air.

"Ah!" he answered doggedly, "all I said was, 'there's some could speak if they chose.' And there's things that may be left in the pockets even of the 'ighest."

"Look 'ere, young Bert," said Mr. Whaley, rising again ponderously, and with a new threat in his face: "I'm not going to have any of *that*." Then shaking a considerable sausage of a forefinger at the lad, he added, "When you say 'the 'ighest' that's enough! Don't let me 'ear you speak again: leastways not on jewels and such like. There's only one name that it can mean you're driving at"—and there

rose up within his mind the majesty of the master, Humphrey de Bohun.

"I'm driving at no one," said the Boy, struck suddenly again with terror. He had not dreamed that the upper servants felt so strongly upon the immunity of lords such as he in whose pocket the gem, to Ethelbert's certain knowledge, reposed—for he had put it there.

"You've been a-brushing the clothes, young lad, have yer? Yes, of course you have; that's your place; and setting 'em out as they should be set. And you say you found something in the pocket of the 'ighest, did you?"

"I never . . ." began Ethelbert, almost on the point of howling.

"You shut your dangerous young mouth," shouted Mr. Whaley. "It's talking like that against your betters as 'as put many and many a lad in prison."

"Oh, sir!" said the unfortunate Bert.

"Now look here, my Boy," went on Mr. Whaley, in his heaviest manner, slowly transforming himself into the distant Superior and pronouncing divine moral judgment and guidance, as it were, for the very young. "You listen to me, and listen solemn. This may be a turning point in your life, it may. Talk like this among the lower servants, let alone a little bastard not yet sixteen, 'as been the ruin of some—aye, of many. So I tell ye. The gaols are full of 'em. Now, you mark what I say, young Ethelbert"—it was the first time he had ever used the entire name, but the occasion demanded it—"one word from your lips, and you're ruined. It's well you come to one like me, that might be your father like, and that has a care for your future, my lad. Remember that! One word from your

lips, and you're ruined. It's not for you to be piecing this and that together. Gentlemen 'ave got ways o' their own, and, anyhow, I'm slow to believe you. There may be a game about all this, and, anyhow, not a word from your lips. Mark, my lad!" he went on, his voice booming, "ye're lost if ye speak. Have you taken that?" he ended, almost shouting again.

"Oh, yes, sir!" said the miserable Ethelbert, trembling. "Oh, sir, I meant no harm. . . ."

"Well, then, you go and *do* no harm," concluded Mr. Whaley, and waved the infant away.

Mr. Whaley rose to his full height and girth and stretched. He looked in a little square looking-glass, one of his necessities of life, thought his tie doubtful, carefully and gingerly put on a new one, worthy of the occasion. His boots—he glanced down at them—yes, his boots would do. His trousers were just what they should be. The fringe of hair round the majestic dome of his head never needed attention less than now.

It was a solemn moment in history. He, George Whaley, a man of weight and years, possessed, moreover, now of a sufficient competence, but not undesirous of making it larger still, was in possession of the dread secret. The head of the de Bohuns, one of His Majesty's principal Secretaries of State, had fallen, fallen, fallen! Humphrey de Bohun had pinched his own daughter's emerald. The Emerald of Catherine the Great. The fortune of the de Bohuns lay concealed by his master's hand, awaiting the receiver's gold. Oh, horror! In what embarrassment the unfortunate man had committed the fatal act Mr. Whaley

knew not: could so good a man have been blackmailed by scoundrels? Why should he need money—and money at such risk? Alas! who can plumb the depths of the human heart? thought George Whaley—indeed, he almost spoke the words aloud, so apposite did they seem, and so often had he read them in his book of devotions. Yet was it so! And ever, in the least expected places, thought George Whaley again, lies the solution of a mystery. He shot his cuffs, drew himself up, coughed a little, and rehearsed the scene.

“I beg your pardon, sir, may I have the honour of a moment’s confidential word with you?” And then another discreet cough.

Then how to put it? He thought long and deeply. He must put it with sympathy—almost as a friend. He must not forget that he was talking to a superior. It would need very skilful handling; but what are butlers for if they cannot skilfully handle? It is the very core of buttlings!

He had handled other situations in his other situations, had Mr. Whaley: none quite so delicate as this, but still, some of ’em pretty delicate. Yes; he must talk to Humphrey as a friend. Respectfully, but as a friend: and above all firmly. It was clear that such a service would merit some reward.

God knows, there would be no tone of menace! Oh, no! Whatever honorarium might accrue to George Whaley as a reward for such revelation should be the gift of a grateful heart alone: and, said Mr. George Whaley to his own conscience, why not? He would be doing his master a very great service. Indeed, he would be doing a double service—nay, a treble one. For he would be rescuing the Home Secretary of England from his lower self; that was a moral

service. He would be preventing him from inevitable discovery; that was a material service. He would be serving him faithfully as an honest domestic should; and that was a service of loyalty.

Was it to be wondered at (the whole scene rose vividly before his eyes as it was to be—as it certainly would be), was it to be wondered at that the grateful man should, on an impulse, seize the honest servitor's hand, grasp it warmly, and then, with a catch in his voice, cry aloud, "Whaley, you have served me well!" The rest would follow. Not less, he took it, than five hundred pounds.

Should he go further? Should he offer his services for taking back the gem discreetly and seeing that it should be laid, through means he could command, upon the dressing-table of the culprit's daughter—no one should know whence?

Time must show; the opportunity would develop; the details of the drama would be filled in. But the main lines were clear. George Whaley would save the head of the family of de Bohun; he would save the soul—and, incidentally, the more earthly reputation—of the head of the family of de Bohun. He would receive the little spontaneous, heartfelt reward due to so honest a liegeman of the de Bohuns. Ah! Chivalry was not dead. . . .

But nothing must be done on impulse. He glanced at his watch. It was only just past three. He must watch the poor tortured soul until there had developed in it, as inevitably there would through the effect of time, a false security—a false security brought by suspicions and counter-suspicions among the guests, who could never dream the real truth. Upon such a mood the revelation would fall with tenfold effect.

Then, and then only—he would watch his moment—would George Whaley unburden himself of the curse of the de Bohuns and turn that curse into a blessing; moral to his master, and to himself material.

Such was the plan of George Whaley. Once more he recited, but in an undertone, a whisper, the words of which could not be heard by another, the very phrases he was to use, the gestures proper to the great moment when it should come. So discreetly did he rehearse that young Ethelbert without, his ear glued to the keyhole, heard nothing but a murmur of monologue within, and feared in one wild moment that the awful revelation about Lord Galton had driven the butler mad.

Chapter Seven

 MARJORIE had insisted upon seeing her father alone, and she had worked it easily enough.

The Professor in his relief from the accursed emerald had fallen into a sprightly mood. He had compelled young Galton to take a *second* walk, and therein had bored the turfist to agonies; which only shows that God is just, and that we are punished in that by which we sinned; in Galton's case, the avenue. During that walk the crystallographist volubly explained his exciting experiences in the past as an amateur detective. His large prattling mouth discoursed of marvellous sleuth-deeds in the past. But he did not go too far. He said nothing of emeralds. He kept the tit-bit, the great revelation, for his host—and he knew at what time to deliver it.

As for McTaggart, there was no difficulty in getting rid of *him*. All he desired was to be alone. He wandered off all solitary. Victoria Mosel, left with no one but Aunt Amelia, fled; and Aunt Amelia, once in her chair, was safe to remain there for the rest of the afternoon. Therefore was Marjorie safe to tell her father what should be done.

Her temper was at breaking point; she was in that mood when women will blame whatever is nearest at hand and most defenseless; and what more admirable butt than a widowed parent?

"Papa," she said, "there's only one thing to be done. You must get a detective! At once!"

"My dear child! My dear child!" said the shocked politician, all the traditions of the de Bohuns rising in his blood, "a detective at Paulings!"

"Oh, stuff and nonsense!" said the dutiful daughter. "I'm sick of all that. Considering the kind of people you *do* have in Paulings—gaol birds like Tommy, and that damned old fool Cousin Bill, who steals diamonds . . ."

"Hush! My dear, hush!" begged the appalled and terrified Home Secretary. He had noticed an open door, and hurriedly shut it. "Besides which, apart from being overheard, really, one must not say such things!"

"Say what?" retorted Marjorie sharply. "Oh, papa, for Heaven's sake don't talk any more nonsense, but do get that detective!"

"I can hardly telephone on such a thing as that," hesitated the poor man weakly. "Everything I say over the telephone is known at the exchange. And we know what happened that time when they were paid by *The Howl*. As for letting one of the servants do it . . ."

"Oh! Good heavens, papa!" said Marjorie. "Isn't there a car? Go up in the car! Tell Morden all about it."

"Morden can hold his tongue," mused de Bohun thoughtfully.

"Of course he can!" snapped Marjorie.

"But . . ." hesitated her father, again, "I don't see how . . . what with the guests . . . and I wouldn't have them suspect for worlds. . . ."

And as he said this he saw out of the corner of his eye his two cousins coming back towards the house, close at hand; the elder one was gesticulating in fine fury in his

new-found happiness, and the other paced sombrely fierce at the end of his torture. Before they could open the front door . . .

"Oh, damn!" said Marjorie—and she nearly added "you." "I'll telephone to you from my room. I'll give you an excuse to say the Home Office is calling." And she flew upstairs.

She was safely at her telephone before the two cousins had passed the front door. She gave them time to get into her father's presence, or for her to guess, at any rate, that one of them would be in the library. Then, with the promptitude of the young and the modern, she did the trick. The basement had put her through, and the bell on the big desk rang smartly. Galton and the Professor, sitting there in the room with the Home Secretary, looked up as quickly as did their host. He was on the receiver with a nervous rapidity; and the conversation was of a simple sort which I almost blush to recall.

"Now, papa, just tell them you've got to go to town because there is a hurried summons in London. Tell them you'll be back in a couple of hours."

"Who's on?" said Lord Galton.

"Yes! Yes!" said de Bohun. "All right! Yes! The Home Office? Ah! Yes? Tell me the details," knitting his brows a little; then turning to his two cousins, "It seems they want me at Whitehall."

The Telephone: "Hurry up, papa; it's all got to be fitted in pretty damn close, you know; they've got to get the man, and he's got to be got here by this afternoon, and got somehow!"

The Home Secretary: "Ah? Yes!" Frowning, "Oh!

that's serious—well! You want me at once? All right! It's Saturday afternoon you know! Is Morden there? Tell him I'll be up within the hour." Then he turned to his guests. "Yes, they want me at once, it seems. Most urgent. But they say it won't take long." He spoke into the receiver in his turn: "Do you think I can get back here by five or a little after in the car? . . . Yes," turning round and nodding at his guests thoughtfully, "they say I can get back by five—or a little after, in the car. What a business it is! I have often wondered," he added sententiously as he hung up the receiver on its hook and rang the bell to order the car—"I have often wondered what makes men take office. It's a tradition," he sighed. "Some one must serve the State! But it's a weary business." All this for the benefit of his two cousins, as though they had been a public meeting. "I'll get back at once; my man can do it in forty minutes from here if he takes the cut by Muffler's Lane, and there's not much traffic after the first two hours of a Saturday afternoon."

The car was round promptly enough. It was stopped within five miles for the great man to telephone back—from a local box—to Paulings for something he had forgotten to leave word of. But he did not telephone to Paulings. He telephoned to the Home Office, of which he was the chief. To such abasement do modern contrivances drive us. He called up the invaluable Morden and discovered to his enormous relief that the invaluable Morden, though it was a Saturday and already a quarter to four, was working away.

Within twenty minutes more the great statesman was

in his official palace of Whitehall. Morden was there all right, as the telephone had told him. Morden was there! Oh invaluable Morden! have you not earned those directorships and that sinecure in the Engrossing Department? By God! you have.

"Morden," said the Home Secretary.

"Aye, aye," answered Mr. Morden wittily.

"You know Scotland Yard?"

Morden did not turn a hair. Did he know Scotland Yard? Did he? He, Morden of the Home Office! The man who laid the traps for the scapegoats . . . the man who worked the parks.

So young—not forty—he had already seen pass before him a long troop of politicians, and he was ready to take any folly from them, short of physical violence. So when he was asked whether he, the junior brain of the Home Office, knew the place and institution called Scotland Yard, he said that he did; and he said it as naturally as though he had been asked for some information on Thibet.

"Now who do you think," said the Home Secretary musingly, as he rose from his chair and paced up and down the enormous room, his brows tortured with deep thought—"who do you think there would be—connected with Scotland Yard, mind you!—who would undertake a private inquiry, and be rigidly secret?"

"They are all rigidly secret," said Morden simply.

The Home Secretary wagged his long head with a weary simulation of cunning, and a would-be sly smile illuminated—or at least undimmed—his eye.

"That's all right for the *public*, Morden," he said. "But

you'll see what I mean in a moment. Could they find some one even *more* rigidly secret than the rest? Eh?"

"I could," said Morden. "I can tell you his name. A man called Brailton, close over sixty, but very good indeed. He was the man we used when there was that trouble about the death in Lady Matcham's house just before her administration went out of office."

"Oh, was he?" cried the Home Secretary eagerly. "Was he?" Then with great satisfaction in his voice: "In that case he *is* all right. It was certainly astonishing, the way that was kept back. . . . You see, Morden, it's something of the same case here. *The trouble is in my own house . . . Paulings.*"

For once Morden was genuinely taken aback. He was silent. "I see," he at last murmured gravely. "*Your house—and the safe side?—Of course!*"

"It's in my own house—and the safe side? Good God, yes!" The Home Secretary spoke firmly. Then after a pause he added, "When they find out who has done it . . ."

"Done what?" said Morden.

"Never mind," answered his courteous chief. "You're bound to know all about it in good time. Well, as I was saying, when they know who's done it, it might turn out to be some one of whom not a soul in the Press must know that he has done it. I mean, if he *has* done it, nobody must know that it was *he* who did it, outside the few who know that he *has*. Have I made myself quite, *quite* clear?" he asked anxiously.

"Perfectly," said Morden.

"Now this man Brailton. When could he get down to Paulings?"

"He could come at an hour's notice," said Morden. "He got back from Yorkshire last night, and he's got nothing on for the moment."

"Ring him up," said the Home Secretary.

It was at six removes, and took just over ten minutes. The man in the outer room rang up the department, which told the section, which sent for the controller, who gave the order to the third floor, which got hold of the group, and the group had the good fortune to find Brailton at the end of a wire. Brailton would take whatever train he was told, and was waiting.

The Home Secretary meditated.

"I am going down by car now," he said. He looked at his watch. "It takes well under the hour by train—it's not seventeen miles. I shall be home by half past five, and I'll tell Marjorie. The best train is the six-thirty from St. Pancras. It gets down in forty minutes. I'll have him met and brought straight to Paulings. He'd be in time for dinner. . . . By the way," he added suddenly, as a thought struck him, "he'll be all right, will he? Go down?"

"Perfectly," said Morden eagerly. "Perfectly."

"No one'll suspect anything?" persisted his chief anxiously.

"Oh, no, no, no!" assured Morden airily. "I know the man like an uncle. Quiet, silver, rather too refined, silent, tall. Dresses—if anything—a little too carefully. At Lady Matcham's he passed for a Don working in Egypt who hadn't come to London for months. And in this last Yorkshire case he passed as a *Times* correspondent just

back in England from the east after some years. All you have to do is to make up good reasons for people not having seen him before. He passes perfectly."

"The accent?" said the Home Secretary, knitting his brows again. "Is—well—you know what I mean?"

"Oh, perfectly. It's beautiful; it's remarkably smooth—yet not conspicuous," said Morden. Then, "You knew old Dickie Hafton?" he added suddenly.

"Of course I knew old Dickie Hafton!" answered the indignant Home Secretary. "He was my mother-in-law's first cousin—went to the Lords in 1895 and to the Lord in 1910. Fond o' women." And there rose before his mental eye the image of that aged peer, thin, aquiline, too proud, too careful of his dress, a man of exquisite voice a trifle thin in tone, but how precise! with the old, not uncharming habit of a few French words here and there. A public figure to the last, famous for his activities in the evangelical world.

"Well," answered Morden, "old Brailton's the startling image of Dickie Hafton. You'll like him. He goes down."

"All right," said the Home Secretary, hugely satisfied. "That's settled! I'm off; I leave it to you to make arrangements. The six-thirty."

But to make his chief quite at ease, Morden whispered something in his ear.

"Really?" said the Home Secretary, as he struggled into his coat—and he said it very loudly, so that everyone could hear it in the next room, to Morden's horror. "Not old Dickie's *son*? There wouldn't be time for it!"

Morden nodded mysteriously, and whispered again: "Yes, there is! He was only eighteen. . . . It was the housemaid at his grandmother's." And the Home Secretary went out bemused and marvelling at the strange revelations of this our world.

Chapter Eight

 ANY of our most important modern inventions have been forestalled by the Chinese, for whom we should have the greater regard in that they are not Christians. Gunpowder, False Money, the art of Printing, Diplomacy, Propaganda, Prison Fortunes, Taximeters and the Strike—all these are of the extreme Orient. But what have I to do with all these? It is of the Mariner's Compass that I sing—which also was first spotted by the Chink.

Now of the various forms of Mariner's Compass there is one with which some few of my readers may be acquainted. It is used in certain scientific experiments which have nothing to do with pointing to the North, but with the measurement of delicate electrical hints. The needle swings on a jewelled pivot, very nicely balanced, encased in a small round box about an inch across, covered in with glass so that no dust can affect the very sensitive affair; and at the side there is a little stud on a spring which you press with your finger when you want to fix and register the pointing of the needle. So long as you press the stud the needle stands firm. When you release the stud the needle trembles again.

All very interesting. But what of it?

Wait a moment. Retain this clearly in your mind, and I will proceed to the second point.

It has been remarked by the less stupid of psychologists

—and that is not saying much—that cunning and intelligence are not often combined. Conversely, as Dr. Nancy Neerly shrewdly remarked, when her assistant at the Hospital for Nervous Diseases, gonophed her microscope, extreme incompetence is often accompanied by cunning. Nothing is more cunning than your half-wit.

Getting that principle firmly into your head, you will appreciate that when Professor de Bohun slunk out in the evening after his cousin's departure for town, into the neighbouring suburban villas of Bakeham (which, for one thing, fringed the Park—the de Bohuns had long ago screened it by a dense row of quickly-growing timber—and for another, provided the Home Secretary with a considerable part of his insufficient income) his action was not unconnected with that upon which his mind had been exercised for now nearly twenty-four hours.

He sought a policeman, and said with a sudden squeak which made that high official jump:

"Oh! Can you tell me if anyone round here sells scientific instruments? Optical instruments? Electrical instruments? . . . Instruments?"

"Wot?" said the policeman.

"Let us say . . . ah, for instance," went on the squeaky voice, "clinometers. . . . Shall we say Clinometers? Clinometers? . . . Yes! Clinometers!"

"Pass along!" said the policeman. "Pass along!" And there was that in his eye of a man who hesitates between a verdict of lunacy and arrest for leg-pull.

"But, Constable . . . " pleaded the unfortunate cadet of an ancient house.

"Pass on! Pass on!" boomed the tyrant, and as there

was a difference of at least three octaves between the two men's voices, the unfortunate Professor obeyed the double bass, crossed the street at the risk of his life, and wandered inanely past the shop windows.

But there is a Providence for such as he, as also for drunkards and babes; and there, right before him, was an ancient bow window of bottle-glass panes; the name of the shop in old Georgian script; the information that it had been founded in 1805; and, behind the glass, two telescopes, a microscope, a clock, several watches, and a sextant of immense age.

The Professor went in.

"What I want . . . ah!" he said. Then his eye fell upon the very thing he desired. It lay there in a glass case, and the owner of the shop, no younger than his customer, brought it out with a palsied hand.

"That's it," said the Professor, nodding genially. "That's it. That's what I want. That's it." Slipping it into his pocket, he made for the door, nodding good day.

"Hi! Mister! That'll be five guineas," said the ancient. Oh! vileness of avaricious age! He had seen his client coming out by the garden gate by the Great House, he had noted guilty haste, he had noted academic idiocy, and he charged accordingly.

"Oh, yes! Of course . . . ah! *What! Five guineas? . . . five guineas! FIVE GUINEAS!*"

It was a sickener. But the wages of Sin is Death. He must have it—or something of the sort. And he must have it now, before Humphrey got home. Sin will not wait.

Believe me or not, but there was positively a flush upon the yellow cheek of the hoary intriguer, a flush that con-



2

*Deplorable moral lapse of Professor de Bohun
(pronounced Boon).*

trusted charmingly with his straggling white whiskers, as he parted with two half crowns and a note. It was a severe struggle. To comfort himself he pressed the stud again. Yes, it worked all right. He toddled back, and got in at the very moment when his cousin's car was buzzing up the drive, back from London.

Professor de Bohun was determined to lose no time. He got rid of his overcoat and his hat with surprising agility, and met the master of the house at the door as though he had been in for hours.

But his was not a temperament to introduce a subject with finesse. He went blindly at it.

"Humphrey," he said, ere ever the Home Secretary was across the step, "I want to see you. I want to see you now . . . yes, now . . . rather urgently. . . . I want to see you now."

The Man of Little Peace nodded wearily.

"Come along," he said.

His mind jumped back to the false scent of the morning. He suddenly wondered whether, after all, Cousin Bill was going to confess? Galton's statement had been clear enough. He had said in so many words that he had *seen* an emerald in the Professor's hand. And the head of the family would have believed anything, almost of the Professor in the way of such follies since the great Mullingar affair.

"What is it, Bill?" he said, as he shut the door of his study.

"Ah!" said the Ancient, almost archly. "What do you think? The E-M-E-R-A-L-D! Eh? Eh?"

He searched in his pocket. Humphrey de Bohun looked

to see the jewel appear. Not at all. What appeared was a little round brass box, glass cased, and in it a trembling needle, that shook and shivered like a gossamer in a breeze.

"Now, my dear Humphrey," said the Professor, "let us take two chairs; yes . . . two chairs . . . two chairs. Ah! yes, two chairs." They took two chairs. "And let me pull up this little table. . . ." He had become almost business-like, not to say sprightly, in concentrating upon what he was about to do.

"Now, then; here we are, we two on these two chairs as it were, are we not? Yes! And here you see this little instrument, do you not? Yes! And do you know what it does . . . what it is? What it is . . . ? It's a talcometer."

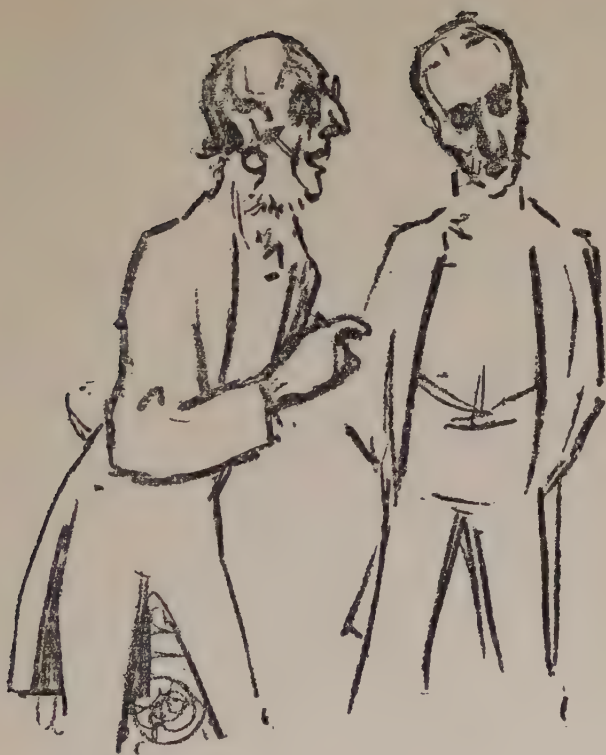
"A what?" said the Home Secretary.

"A talcometer," said Professor de Bohun, lying freely, and puffing slightly after the effort. "Now, Humphrey, I want you to watch something. To watch something, eh! Ah! yes. You have, I take it—ah!—or Marjorie has, or some one has a jewel—sure to have one. A diamond, say. Any stone—crystal. A stone, at any rate. . . ."

"I don't know," began Humphrey de Bohun, wondering what was to be. "Will this do?" he asked, leaning over towards his writing table and pulling off it the little crystal Chinese god which was used to weight down the papers which he had abandoned there so many days.

Anything would do for the deceitful pedant. He nodded cheerfully.

"Yes," he said, "so long as it's crystal. Anything crystal. Crystal." Then he added, "Now, Humphrey, watch. Here," holding the little round brass disk with its trembling needle, "I have our talcometer. Now here," moving the



Professor de Bohun explains to the head of the family his theory—or rather, certitude—upon the whereabouts of the Great Emerald.

Chinese god into line with the axis round which the tiny filament of metal trembled, "here we have this talcometer, *and* the crystal. Eh! *And* the crystal. . . . Now watch, Humphrey!"

Holding the little round brass case with his left finger and thumb, he gradually with his right hand approached the heathenish idol, sliding the False God slowly along the polished table-top towards the instrument. It came closer and closer. It was at 9 inches, 6 inches, 3 inches, . . . but there was as yet no apparent effect, when, suddenly, with the Pot-bellied Dwarf Deity at about 2 inches off, or a little less, the needle behaved like a pointer: it stood immovable, held rigidly by some strange force. The stud, dear friends, but how could Humphrey de Bohun know that?

"There! You see that? See that? See that?" squeaked the Professor triumphantly. "Now I want you to test it for yourself. Move the little devil away! Move it yourself! Humphrey, move it yourself!"

Humphrey de Bohun very slowly pushed back the crystal, and almost immediately the needle trembled again.

"There!" said the Professor in happy confidence, leaning back. "There! What did I tell you?"

"Well, what of it, Bill?" said the harassed master.

"What of it?" answered his cousin. "The Emerald. Ah! the Emerald!" and he rubbed his hands together.

"I don't understand a word you're saying," said poor Humphrey.

The Professor leaned forward and tapped his cousin twice upon the shoulder with that knotted forefinger.

"That instrument," he said, as solemnly as such a voice can say anything, "tells a crystal close at hand. According

to the cube of the distance. I have to use it perpetually. Very well known. German, you know—wonderful people, the Germans. It was Meitz's idea," he went on, adding verisimilitude by the effective use of detail. "But *he* couldn't have done it without Speitzer. Often like that in research work. Any doubt about a crystal's character. Even amorphous—put that thing close enough, and it points at once. Now do you see? Eh! Now do you see?"

"Not exactly," said Humphrey de Bohun.

"Why, it's plain enough! I hadn't thought of it. It suddenly occurred to me. It suddenly came to me while you were off to London. Here I had what could solve all our troubles. I put it first here, then there. Everywhere I could. Went on for an hour—all over the room! All over the rug where it dropped. Then one of your guests came in. I didn't want to be seen at it. I was putting it back into my pocket when my hand came close by the side of his coat. Bless my heart! It pointed!"

He leant forward again and tapped his cousin more solemnly still, this time on the chest. "Mark my words! That young man's got it!"

"Which young man?" said Humphrey, remembering what counter accusation the Professor would naturally make, and thinking at once of Galton.

"That young writing fellow," said Cousin Bill. "That newspaper chap McTaggart. McTaggart, McTaggart, McTaggart, McTaggart, McTaggart."

Humphrey de Bohun hesitated. "My dear Bill," he said, "you never know. He might have had something else in his pocket—also crystal, or—I don't know . . . something."

The Professor wagged his head with all the dignity of a goat.

"Won't work, Humphrey!" he said. "Won't work! One can always tell the size by the distance. It wasn't some ring or small thing of that kind. Besides which, he wouldn't have such a small thing of his own in his pocket. No, the Emerald's there all right. And I'll tell you something that makes me surer still. I took occasion to brush up against him—there was a hard slab in that pocket, Humphrey. In that pocket. A small, hard slab! Slab! . . . Hard slab! . . ."

An awful task arose in the conscience of Humphrey de Bohun. He must play the spy again. He must mistrust yet another guest.

But wait! Should he tell the great detective when he arrived? No. It would be only fair to seek the young man first and warn him. But he hesitated and he put it off. He would wait till dinner time, or nearly dinner, when the poor fellow was changing. He would make it quite clear that there would be no consequences—only, he must confess and restore. Then he suddenly thought of what would happen if he drew blank, as he had in the case of the strange being before him. But he was in some agony.

Chapter Nine

 HE Home Secretary was in his study before a pleasing fire. The Professor had left him. His daughter was with him. There was no one else in the room. He had asked her to come down a little earlier that he might explain things to her. There was yet a quarter of an hour before they need dress for dinner, and the dread stranger from the Yard might be with them at any moment. He had warned each of his guests that a distinguished diplomat had asked to run down to see him at short notice. The F.O. had sent him on to the Home Office. The matter concerned both departments. The distinguished diplomat would dine. They must excuse his retirement with that official, later in the evening, to discuss high affairs of State.

Such was the fairy tale Humphrey de Bohun had pitched; he hoped it had gone down. And now he was alone again to discuss the matter with his only confidant, his daughter.

"Marjorie," he said, "that man Brailton was to come by the six-thirty. It must be late. I have told them to show him in here *at once*. It is exceedingly important you should know all about it, and that nobody else should. We must hear from him, very briefly, some essential points: for instance, his assumed name."

"He's all right, papa?" asked Marjorie anxiously.

"Perfectly, my dear, perfectly. Morden assures me . . . in fact, Morden told me that he is actually . . ." and then

checked himself. He was still Victorian, was poor Humphrey de Bohun. He didn't like to talk to the bastards of his own class, and to a daughter at that. "At any rate he's all right. Elderly, distinguished—what they call cavalier, I'm told, yes, cavalier. . . . I've already told Aunt Amelia and Tommy that he's a diplomat—a fellow I've got to see after dinner. . . . It's all exact. Which *room* did you say?"

"Senlac, papa. Crécy's being repapered."

The Home Secretary nodded solemnly.

"Senlac will do all right. But you must remember, my dear, that this Mr.—ah!—*Brailton*, that is the name, *Brailton*, is somewhat advanced in years—and . . . and . . . I needn't insist . . . but a refined man and on his *father's* side, of good blood! He will be sensitive."

There was a silence—but not for long. The door was solemnly flung open with a majesty worthy of the occasion, and the Master of the Ceremonies—if I may so call him—George Whaley announced in a controlled but oily voice:

"Mr. Collop!"

Collop? Collop? What was this? The disguise for Brailton?

The father rose to his feet, somewhat painfully, the daughter looked round. And behold! a man sturdy, broad-shouldered, short, clad, not in some soft clinging stuff, but in stout Scotch tweed, which—as to his upper part—was a roomy coat with poachers' pockets, and—as to his lower—plus-fours. His stockings were thick and ribbed, as fashion in a certain world demanded at that moment; but his boots were of that unmistakable sort provided by the Government of the King for his police. The hair was short, coarse,

and thick; the face broad and determined; the eyes straight-forward, grey and far too bold. What the mouth might really be like only its Creator knew, for it was thatched by a moustache so bristling, curt, aggressive and sprouting-out that the eye of the onlooker was fascinated and could not note the ugly lips below.

"Evenin'!" said the Apparition in a powerful voice of low pitch; and as he said it he bobbed the head and shoulders of him towards the man who—for a year or two—controlled the peace—and police—of England.

"Evenin', ma'am," added the Apparition with the same jerk of the head and shoulders towards the Lady of the House. "Cold evenin'? Good fire, I see!" he added with a charming familiarity. "Pleasant thing evenin's the likes o' this, a good fire is."

And as he thus delivered himself with all the natural grace and charm of long experience, his two staggered victims waited for their breaths.

There was but one reply, and the Home Secretary made it pompously and, I am afraid, a little distantly.

"Good evening, Mr. . . . ?"

"Collop," said the stranger, decisively.

"Collop. Ah, yes, Collop. I should have remembered. Mr. Collop, my dear," he said, bending his head towards his daughter, who stared astonished and had not yet recovered herself. "Collop. Yes. Mr. Collop. . . . Mr. Collop. I understand fully. We are to call you Mr. Collop."

"Rather!" said that solid individual. "That's my name *here*," and he winked. "What my name may be elsewhere we both know, eh?" and he winked again.



Sudden Entry of Mr. Collop.



"Ah, Mr. Collop—it is to be Mister, is it not?"

"Yes, Mister," answered the gentleman solemnly, "not Miss nor Master. Who ye're kidding?" He did not say it insolently. He knew his place. He knew he was talking to the Home Secretary. He said, "Who ye're kidding?" by way of a respectful jest.

"Mr. Collop. . . . Yes. . . . Mr. Collop. . . ." stuttered the Home Secretary like a man half stunned. "We expected . . . ah! . . . you will pardon me? . . . a Mr. *Brailton*; yes, a Mr. *Brailton*. . . . Eh? Shall I . . . ah! . . . if by any accident there should be a mistake?"

"There's no mistake," said the genial Collop, "old Brailton 'twas to be! You're right there, mister! But he was that sick he asked me to run down. 'Tis only a suburb job,' says he. So here I am!"

The Home Secretary whispered to his daughter in an agony: "Can't we stop it? Shall we telephone?"

"Too late now—before dressing," said the despairing girl. "I'll tell you when I hear."

Her father knew she was right. They must make the best of it. "Put dinner on in twenty minutes," he whispered to her in an aside; then aloud to his guest, "What . . . ah . . . what shall we . . . to put it plainly, Mr. Collop, what shall we say you are?"

"Ah, I've got that all fixed," said Mr. Collop, his voice bravely riding the air. "Old Brailton told me what *he* was and I'm that. I'm a diplomat, I am. Tokio the last four years."

The call on Marjorie's intelligence woke her to action. "It won't do," she said sharply.

"Why not? Eh?" said Mr. Collop, with less ceremony

than might have been expected from so recent an acquaintance.

"Because," replied the young lady, a little acidly, "one of our guests, Miss Victoria Mosel, has just come back from Japan. She was there in September staying with our Ambassador at Tokio."

"Ah!" said Mr. Collop. "That makes it awkward like."

"I think," began the Home Secretary timidly . . . but the stronger will prevailed.

"Make it Bogotar?" was Mr. Collop's suggestion.

Time, which destroys love itself, and brings mighty states to ruin, the implacable master of ephemeral man, caught the unfortunate father and daughter in his iron grip. There was not a moment to spare. And it was as Mr. Collop, just back from his long but patriotic exile in "Bogotar," that the welcome stranger was led out and ritually introduced to the guests in the next room. There is no need to introduce a guest at such an hour, but this guest! Oh, yes!

As the master of the house and his daughter were making that introduction their cup of agony was full.

What made it worse was that McTaggart, being less of a man of the world, as the saying goes, than the rest of the prisoners, was quite openly startled, and instead of looking at Mr. Collop's determined face, his eyes at once fell to the plus-fours, and he said to himself, as his eyes fell lower still, "Thank God, he hasn't put on those brown boots with funny little tabs to them! But really! For a detective. . . ." Then he looked up at the face—and he, of Fleet Street, knew his man.

Lord Galton stared at the Apparition. He could make neither head nor tail of it. He was not of the Horse Pull-

ing, privileged world. Then he remembered that your professional politicians had to herd with all manner of cattle and he shrugged his mental shoulders so violently that his physical shoulders perceptibly heaved. He turned his back upon the company and examined a picture until the nervous strain was over.

Victoria Mosel was vastly pleased. It was as good as the Zoo—and she loved the Zoo. She promised herself an unholy feast and whispered to Marjorie to put her next the Diplomat at dinner. She was not a woman of gesture, or of external expression; but she very nearly clapped her hands for joy. She had seen some funny things in the diplomatic service in the time of her teeth, which were no longer short, but the like of this she had never seen; and she thought, as many a contemporary has thought since Queen Victoria's death, "We're getting on!"

Then she began to speculate within her own clear mind as to how this monster had got into the diplomatic service at all. But she remembered certain odd accidents during the war and other people than he who had suddenly popped up in embassies at the F.O.—quite out of nature; and just as she had all but clapped her hands, so she now all but whistled. However, she in fact did neither. Only she looked upon Mr. Collop with a happy, happy face, and felt that here, at last, was not a wasted day.

The Professor was vastly interested. He said "Bogotar" three times, beamed, nodded, and then for a fourth time he said "Bogotar" lingeringly, as though he loved it, and then whispered again, "Ah, yes, of course. Bogotar." And put his head a little on one side and left it there.

As for Aunt Amelia, her failing eyes did not distinguish

the Apparition, but her ears distinguished the accent, and the type of English; and she marvelled feebly that things had changed so much since the days of the Great Lord Salisbury and Peace with Honour. But of one thing she was sure. That if the type of man used for delicate missions abroad might have changed, the policy of Britain was still secure in the hands of whomever the Secretary for Foreign Affairs might choose to entrust with that mighty task; and Bogotar (she imagined) was the capital of Ormuzd and of Ind; barbaric, splendid, and in fee to the British Crown.

"Ah! Shall I show you to your room—eh?" said the Home Secretary courteously, putting an end to what could not be prolonged. "Ah, let me show you to your room."

He went so far as to take the terrible thing by the elbow and actually conduct it out; . . . after an interval sufficient, but not too long, McTaggart followed. He would again be alone. He could not bear to remain with the rich longer than he was compelled, and now that there was a detective in the house he would be discovered. Well, let it be so; let the end come soon.

Now there stood, awaiting McTaggart in the hall, that Devil and that Angel who had been off duty for a few hours, and were now back again, fresh and keen, and bickering, as is the wont of such opposed beings of the other world.

The Angel, seeing his human friend and ward, made him a suggestion at once:

"You ass!" he blew into McTaggart's ear. "Put it in the Rozzer's pocket." The Devil began to object violently.

"You shut up!" said the Angel, turning to him annoyed. "I'll come back and talk to you about it later!" Then he

turned again to McTaggart, and pumped brilliant thoughts into his same ear with such violence that the young man's soul was all irradiated and full and he suddenly thought himself a genius. Such is the vanity of man! So little do we recognise inspiration from on high!

"It's as easy," prompted the Angel, "as falling off a log. All you've got to do is to say you've met him, and tell him who you are. He'll know you're from the Press—you look like it—and he'll think he's met you. *Then* slip it into his pocket, bully boy! Slip it into his pocket!"

And all the time McTaggart was saying within his own soul: "That's a brilliant idea! Now I don't suppose anyone else would have an idea like that! But, there! I'm always getting good ideas at the right time!"

He stalked his host and Collop round the top of the stairs and down the long passage above.

He saw the door open; he heard the Home Secretary say cheerfully, "There's a bath through that door. Have you got everything you want? I hope they've unpacked your things?"

He heard the cheerful voice of Collop reply: "Right-o! Everything in the garden's lovely!"

He saw the Home Secretary go off with a very changed expression in the gloom of the passage. He flattened himself in a deep doorway, a little angry that he should be playing the spy—but necessity drove him. He waited till he had heard his host go down the stairs; then he knocked at the detective's bedroom door. Full of angelic inspiration—which human pride mistook for genius—he entered in.

"Mr. Collop," he said without hesitation, "you know

me? Hamish McTaggart—the *Daily Sun*? . . . You'll excuse me for not using your real name?" And he smiled.

"Why, Mr. McTaggart, I've heard of you often enough. Where did we meet? And as for the real name"—he winked—"less said the better! I'm in the Foreign Office just now. I'm from Bogotar . . . How come? When *did* we meet?"

"In the Savoy bar," hushed the Angel hurriedly into McTaggart's ear.

"In the Savoy bar," said McTaggart, aloud.

"Not during the Bullingdon case?" said the delighted but indiscreet Mr. so-called Collop, stretching out both his hands.

"Wink!" pumped the Angel; and Hamish McTaggart winked—for the first time in his life.

It was a clumsy wink, rather like that of the hippopotamus when he comes out of the water, in which element the huge pachyderm so serenely sleeps. But it was good enough for the Secret Service.

"Ah! Mr. McTaggart, Mr. McTaggart!" said Collop, shaking both the journalist's hands up and down like pump handles. "Well met! Now then, you'll make a feature of this in the paper, won't you?"

"I'm not here for that," said McTaggart modestly. "I'm only a guest; but of course I can see that *The Howl* . . ."

"Ah! That's the style, laddie! You'll do!" said the Man of Mystery, bringing down a palm like a Westphalian ham on the wincing shoulder of the youth. "A few kind words on the discreet agent, eh? The Bosses'll note 'em down!" He dived into a pocket. "I've got a flask here!"

he said, and winked in his turn. "What I call my good old prohibition! We'll drink to it, eh? To think of meeting the likes of you in a 'ouse like this!"

This last remark wounded McTaggart's pride; but the Angel stood by him, and they that have angels at their side are firm.

Mr. Collop's dress clothes lay beautifully aligned upon a couch, a shirt by the side of them; but the owner's brow clouded as he said:

"Where the devil did I put that flask? Curse them slaveys! I do 'ate 'avin' things done for me on these toff jobs!" He buried his head in the large kit-bag which he had been assured was the proper receptacle or container to bring to the Palaces of the Rich.

And even as he therein delved and groped, with head hidden in the kit-bag, the Angel brought it off!

"Attaboy!" urged the Angel to Hamish. "Slip it into the tail-coat pocket! QUICK!"

And before you could have breathed a silent prayer the Emerald was in the tail-coat pocket of Mr. Collop's evening tail coat, lying there on the couch all innocent.

Up came Mr. Collop's head out of the kit-bag, very red and puffy.

"I thought as much, my 'earty," he said. "Dirty tykes! . . . There it was. . . ." And he brought out a gigantic flask holding perhaps a quart of the detestable beverage. The bottom of it was a silver cup fitted to the glass, and inscribed, "In grateful memory of the Bullingdon Burglary, August, 1928" and with the initials B.F. Mr. Collop solemnly half filled the receptacle, smelt it with delicate

bonhomie, and handed it to his guest, who sipped it with the resolution in which a man must face whatever torture has to be endured.

"Thank you," said Mr. McTaggart, gasping, from his flayed throat.

"Cheerio!" said the Collop man, and he tossed off all that remained—enough, you would have thought, to have felled an elephant in stupor!—down his own more acclimatized gullet. Then he brought out a large tongue, licked his lips, and smacked them.

"Ah, that's something like!" he said. He put the flask and the silver cup belonging to it down on his table with a happy grunt.

"Well, boy, I've got to dress," he said. "So long! We meet again in the Khyber Pass, *i.e.*, at his Nobship's groaning board!" And he laughed heartily at his own wit.

McTaggart remembered something essential. "I say, they mustn't know that I know you!"

"No fear!" said the redoubtable Collop, winking again. "I don't give you away, nor myself away, nor no one away." He had already taken off his tweed coat and waistcoat. "You run off and dress, laddie . . . You keep mum. Same here!" And he dug a podgy finger into McTaggart's staggering chest. And they parted.

.

From her room, interrupting the induing of those three pieces which formed all her raiment, shaking shorn hair, Marjorie telephoned in a fever regardless. "The Home Office. . . . Yes, the Home Office . . . No reply? Oh! Nonsense! . . . What, *our* line gone wrong? D'you mean to say we can't get London? . . . Oh! hell!"

She banged down the receiver . . . There's a schlemozzle! Telephone broken down! Saturday night—the Monster in the Home! And no redress, no aid.

Had she had tears she would have wept. What would come of all this?

Chapter Ten

WHEN Mr. Collop came out, dressed, he was surprised to find his host waiting for him, not to say waylaying him, in the passage outside.

"I thought . . ." began the politician nervously—"I thought I ought to have a word with you, Mr. Collop, before we . . ."

"That's right!" roared Mr. Collop. "That's my style too. Always think of everything!"

"Not so loud! Not so loud!" implored his agonized host. He took the detective aside into yet another room with yet another fire. It looked like some little nursery or schoolroom, and Mr. Collop, used as he was to the houses of the great, marvelled at so many rooms, so many fires . . . an empty room all ready, and with so many pictures in it, though on a bedroom floor.

"Mr. Collop," said the Home Secretary hurriedly when he had shut the door, "I thought I ought to tell you privately, and alone, before we go down to dinner what the circumstances are. The jewel was dropped by my daughter—last night after dinner. My three guests went down on the floor at once to look for it—it was upon the polar-bear rug which you will see in the West Room later. We shall go there together after all have retired. When they got up it had not been found . . . they *said* it had not been found . . . they *all* said it had not been found. . . . There is suspicion naturally, Mr. Collop. . . . You understand me?"

"There's always suspicion when vallybles are missing," said Mr. Collop, after some thought.

"Yes, Mr. Collop, exactly! Precisely!" said the Home Secretary. "But of course, you know, I must be told when you come to any clue. . . . I blame no one. I suspect no one. . . . But the emerald is missing. And what's more," he added with the firmness of a newly stuffed pillow, "I shall not spare the culprit."

"No, of course not," said Mr. Collop sympathetically. "I'll get it for you, never fear."

His manner, though hearty, was respectful enough in such privacy, for he knew that though his promotion depended principally upon permanent officials, a good word from one of the fleeting politicians was not without its value at the Home Office. Therefore did he forbear to lay a hand upon the Home Secretary's shoulder; and therefore—still more—did he forbear to slap it as nature would have seemed to demand.

"Thank you, Mr. Collop," said the Home Secretary gratefully, as though he had been given a considerable sum of money. "I trust you. I trust you implicitly."

"You may trust me *implicitly* and *explicitly*," declared Mr. Collop in solemn religious tones.

"Thank you, oh! Ah! Thank you! Thank you again! Thank you most warmly!" said his host more and more nervously. "Really you know, we must not be seen together. Pray take your time, Mr. Collop; the ladies are always late coming down."

"Ah, that's their sort, ain't it? Girls are the devil now-a-days, aren't they?" said Mr. Collop in his friendliest tones;

and with that farewell in his ears the master of the house slipped out.

The Home Secretary's next action was to go straight to McTaggart's room. It was an act of decision and initiative that you would hardly have expected in so well-bred a man. But suffering is a powerful tonic. He knew what he was after. He had to speak. He would come boldly, directly and simply. He would tell the young man of what he was accused, and ask him straightforwardly and at once to clear himself—or at any rate to say "yes" or "no." He knocked on the door; he went in; and he began thus:

"Ah, Mr. McTaggart! Mr. McTaggart! I'm afraid I am interrupting you in your dressing. It is really very rude of me! I wish . . . But the fact is . . . It's rather important. . . . I want to put it to you as clearly as I can, and you'll understand me when I say that time presses after a fashion . . . so to speak. . . ."

McTaggart was at the last stage when the male brushes the hair before he puts on the coat; all the rest of the detestable ritual was accomplished, including the sacrosanct tie. He stood gaping with his round face, a brush in either hand. Then he said:

"Yes, certainly, sir, if you please." He rapidly brushed his disordered hair into a shape yet more disordered, struggled into his coat, and then, with an odd reminiscence of manner elsewhere, said, "Won't you sit down," feeling that he was a temporary host, as it were, a host within his host's house; a nest of Chinese boxes.

"Thank you," said the Home Secretary. "Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you." And he sank his long, lean and therefore gentlemanly body into the only arm-

chair. He crossed his long, lean and therefore gentlemanly legs, poised his two hands together like a steep Norwegian roof, and said:

"Mr. McTaggart, you will think it very odd of me, this invasion of your . . . er, your, ah . . . privacy? Yes, your privacy, er! If I may say so. But there is something very important I must say to you before we go down to dinner."

"Yes, sir," said McTaggart, still expectant, as he slowly filled his pockets with the various things which journalists carry about with them, even among the great, and which destroy the shape of their clothes.

"Mr. McTaggart . . ." began the Home Secretary desperately, now leaning forward with his elbow on his knee and his forehead in his hand. "What I have to say is not very easy, but it is best to get these difficult things over at once. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, certainly," said McTaggart.

"I mean," said the Home Secretary, "it would be a great pity to waste a moment in beating about the bush. There's no sense in mere verbiage and slow approach to the essentials. Moreover, my time is short: I mean our time is short. . . . I mean there's not much time before dinner, and to tell the truth, that's why I came in here, so apparently suddenly. . . . What was I saying?"

Then, looking up and leaning back again in the chair: "But we need not go into all that. As I say, the great thing is to come to the point at once, isn't it?"

McTaggart was tired of standing up. He sat down in another chair, and said "Yes," with a look of expectancy not quite unmingled with approaching boredom.

"Well, Mr. McTaggart," went on the great statesman

at last desperately, like a man who has determined to take a plunge. "You will excuse my being quite blunt and straightforward, won't you?"

"Of course," said McTaggart.

"I mean, we have already agreed that wasting time in preliminaries over a matter of this kind . . ."

"But a matter of *what* kind?" said McTaggart, now roused—though his guilty soul told him well what was coming.

"Well, the fact is, Mr. McTaggart," said the Home Secretary, suddenly uncoiling himself and straightening out the joints until he stood up above the younger man—he felt it gave him a kind of moral advantage, and he needed it—"the fact is, it's only fair to tell you . . . only the difficulty is how to put it. But one must be straightforward, mustn't one?"

And once more Mr. McTaggart said "Yes." But certain ancient traditions of the middle class were stirring in his blood and he very nearly added, "You doddering old fool."

"Why then, Mr. McTaggart, to put it quite plainly, . . . well, now, perhaps I ought to say this first. You know my cousin William? The Professor?"

"Yes," said Mr. McTaggart, for the sixth time and with a touch of savagery in his voice, "I do. I have been in this house with him for over twenty-four hours."

"He tells me, Mr. McTaggart," began the Home Secretary seriously and half an octave lower—"mind you, I don't say I believe it!"

"No?" said McTaggart. "Well, go on."

"He tells me he has proof, *scientific* proof— Mind you, I don't say I believe him! I'm only saying what he said."

"Yes," said McTaggart, for the seventh time, and with more patience.

"Scientific proof, I say—not personal, you understand. No personal insinuation whatever—~~only~~ *scientific* proof that the emerald is or was—shall I say, has been, upon your—damn it all!—*person*."

McTaggart started up. The issue was joined. He behaved very well.

"Mr. de Bohun," he said, in a slow but frank and straightforward way, "you are not bound to believe me. But not only have I not the emerald, but I will not even take the trouble to swear I have not got it. *I have not got the Emerald. Is that clear?*"

"Yes," said his unfortunate host. With a world of apology in his voice and stretching forth a deprecating hand! "Oh, yes, Mr. McTaggart! Yes, quite clear!"

"Not only have I *not* got the emerald," McTaggart went on with painfully clear diction, "but I know who has."

"Oh! Lord," thought the Home Secretary, "another of 'em!" Then he said aloud: "Ah? Oh! most *interesting!* Who?"

The other phrases he had heard during the last twenty-four hours crowded upon him, and he felt slightly faint.

"Yes," said McTaggart, continuing in a virile intonation, "I know who has it. *Mr. Collop has it!*"

"What?" shouted the Home Secretary, startled into a lucid interval of terseness. "Think what you are saying, young man! Collop! He wasn't in the house when it was lost! He's only just come."

"That's true," hesitated the journalist, slowly turning over in his own mind how he should get out of this mess. "But I tell you what, I tell you he's got it. . . . It's only an instinct," he added with sudden humility. "I have these odd feelings sometimes—and they are usually right. My mother was a Highland woman, and I am the seventh son of a seventh son. I don't pretend to any proof. All I say is"—more firmly—"Mr. Collop has got the emerald." He gathered confidence. He struck his left open palm with his right fist and said: "Mr. de Bohun, Mr. Collop has got the emerald . . . and as for me, you may go through my pockets, here and now, you may have me searched, here and now if you will, and all my clothes and all the drawers in the room and every corner in the room, and anything else you will. And what's more," he said, as he saw still further weakness in that weak old face, "I mean to stay in this house till the emerald appears. I owe that to my honour."

"Oh, Mr. McTaggart," said the Home Secretary imploringly, and even as he spoke, he heard steps on the stairs and knew that they must be going down, "don't misunderstand me! I am not accusing you! I wouldn't accuse you for a moment! I am only saying . . . I am only repeating to you what was told to me. Indeed, I should be treating you very ill had I not done so. Don't you agree?" and he actually seized the young man's hand.

McTaggart accepted the gesture.

"I am grateful, sir," he said simply. "I quite understand that a man in my position would be naturally suspected."



*Mr. McTaggart explains to the Great Statesman
his theory—or rather, certitude—upon the
whereabouts of the Great Emerald.*

"Don't say that, Mr. McTaggart"—all the gentleman in him arising to patronize poverty—"don't say that!"

"I say I can understand that a man in my position should be suspected. But you will see; mark my words, you will see after no long space of time that I was right. I have an instinct in such things."

"But damn it all! Mr. McTaggart! Collop? Damn it all, think!"

"No," said Mr. McTaggart, moving towards the door, "I tell you I am sure, for I had it in a dream." And he and his bewildered host went downstairs.

The Home Secretary, as he moved by the young man's side towards the big drawing-room where they were all to assemble, felt in his mind something like a kaleidoscope or like the music in the drunken scene of "The Master Singer," or like a Wiggle-Woggle or like the Witching Waves. . . . Galton had seen Cousin William with the emerald. He had seen it with his own eyes—or else he lied. Cousin William had worked an infallible scientific test, and the Emerald had certainly been on McTaggart or else *he* lied. And yet McTaggart had not got it—or else *he* lied. The Home Secretary's powerful mind kept on returning to the central point, "How the hell could they *all* have it, and least of all how could Collop have it? That *must* be nonsense! . . . Anyhow, Collop was there, that was a relief. It was his business to find out." Had Mr. de Bohun been in the habit of prayer he would have prayed fervently that Collop would track down the real man.

But side by side with that relief rose an immense wave of apprehension, for he remembered what manner of deep-sea

beast Collop was, and he sickened at the coming ordeal of the dinner.

Nor was he wrong.

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In the hall the Devil and the Angel were having a most furious row.

"What I want to bring home to you," said the Devil, pressing a red-hot forefinger upon a smoking palm, "is that you've intruded. You've done something I only had the right to do. It was *my* place to suggest McTaggart passing the Emerald on!"

"It was nothing of the sort," said the Angel angrily. "You're like all devils; you won't listen to reason." Then he began to count off on the larger feathers of his wing. "Firstly, it's up to me to protect the young man. *Secondly*, it does no sort of harm if the 'tec finds that stone; why, it's all the better for him! It relieves a lot of honest and dishonest men from suspicion. *Thirdly*"— Here he hesitated, as theologians often do upon thirdly, thinking what he could scrape up. But the Devil interrupted him.

"Never mind your 'thirdly.' It's a dirty trick, slipping jewels into people's pockets! And dirty tricks are my stunts, not yours. Wasn't it me," he added with a rising grievance in his voice, "that made the old Don stick it into his pocket to begin with?"

Then the Angel played the trick which I am sorry to say is always being played upon poor devils: he played the trick of the superior person.

"Well," he said, "you may be right. I can't bother about

it. I've got something else to do, and you can go back to hell."

The Devil, stung beyond endurance, grappled and closed. They wrestled magnificently and it was fifty-fifty—as it always is with devils and angels in this world—when the Angel began to get the worst of it. The Devil, though shorter, was in far better training—humanity had seen to that—and he was pressing the Angel down, when the Angel, without scruple, began to increase his size and strength prodigiously, till he towered above the poor Devil like a giant and half broke his back.

"You're cheating!" gasped the Devil. "You're working a miracle!"

"Anything's fair with devils!" said that most unjust Angel.

With which words he transferred himself into the sixth dimension, and the Devil, snubbed, angered, disappointed, impotent to revenge himself, burning to be eased by some ill deed, flew through the night to the Duchess's—it was only four miles—and inspired her with the odious thought that she should start yet another league for bothering the poor. After such beastly solace he went back for the moment to his own place.

Chapter Eleven

URING dinner Mr. Collop was not silent. In vain did the Home Secretary indicate to his servant by a grimace that Mr. Collop's wine should be spared. Mr. Collop had all the assurance of his breeding, and when he wanted more wine he asked for it. It added, if that were possible, to his remarkable courage.

That night was forever memorable to all those present for the instructive lecture which he delivered upon the habits of the people of Bogotar. They all inwardly suffered, or chuckled, as their temperaments demanded. Vic ignored Marjorie's eyes and shamefully stayed on at table as late as possible to carry the torture forward.

The men did not stop long over their wine—for by that name I deign to call the beverage. The evening passed as on a rack for most, while Mr. Collop roared busily of Bogotar, with many a droll tale and many a gesture of large effect to underline it. Once more Vic stuck it out. She was in heaven. She egged the Startler on. She asked question after question on the famous oil-town of the Pearson Contracts. She even asked about the women's love affairs and the British prospectors' entanglements in that ill-known resort.

The Master of the House had to force the situation.

"I am going to ask you," said the Home Secretary, rather pompously, "to excuse me for the rest of the evening. I

have to talk of very important matters with Mr. Collop. We shall be closeted together, I fear, till the small hours of the morning; and I beg that you will not think me discourteous."

The only one of the clot to whom this public speech could possibly be addressed—all the rest were of the Family—was the lately unfortunate, but now radiant, McTaggart. But it is a politician's habit to be pompous whenever he gets the least excuse, and McTaggart was the excuse.

"On official business connected with the . . . ah, with the . . . well . . . it would not be to the public interest to say precisely."

McTaggart looked very carefully from under his eyelashes at his nearest neighbour; Victoria Mosel darted a corner look at Galton, and Galton grimly smiled at Marjorie. Aunt Amelia did not hear properly. Only the Professor rose to the occasion, carolling:

"Certainly, Humphrey, certainly. By all means, Humphrey, by all means." Then he squeezed his bony hands together, as though he had made a joke.

The women dropped out of the room. Marjorie waited above with her door ajar till she should know the way was clear. Then she was to come down.

"Shall we go into my study?" said the Home Secretary to his latest guest, when the women had gone.

"Thank you, I would not give ye that trouble, I wouldn't," said Mr. Collop heartily. "I'd as soon talk 'ere. I think better like in large rooms." And as he said that, the three men went out—perforce. But Galton went not to bet but to the small smoking-room, and Victoria Mosel did the same. Collop filled himself a whiskey and

soda. And without giving his employer time to open the ball, he entered on the plan engendered by his mighty brain.

As he began to speak, Marjorie, following the sound of voices, slipped in. Mr. Collop stared at her, said "'Ullo?" but returned to his business.

"First of all," he said, with a good gulp at the spirits, "ye want a plan made of this here West Room, as ye call it. Now mark me," he insisted, as the Home Secretary half opened his never-quite-shut mouth, "that plan'll 'ave to be in not less than five colours—and I'll tell you for why. In a case of this kind, you 'ave got to distinguish between materials. Remember what ye're looking for! Ye're looking for a object that might be called transparent in a manner o' speaking."

"Mr. Collop," broke in the Home Secretary desperately, "how long will it take to make such a plan?"

"If there's a harchitect 'andy, it needn't take three days. I've 'ad dozens. And next," said Mr. Collop, as loudly as before, "we 'ave to 'ave measurements. We don't need regular surveys and we don't need to fill the garden wi' standards nor flags, but just measurements."

"And how long will these take?" asked the Home Secretary, a fabulous sum mounting up before his eyes, and the impossibility of keeping his guests forever.

"You will observe," said Mr. Collop, clearing his throat as for a speech, and addressing the lady—"you will observe, Miss, that what two men can do in one time, four men can do in arf the time, and eight men—why, eight men in a quarter of the time. And sixteen men," he continued, turning to her progenitor, "they'd take arf as much again. While they're making the plan in one room, if you 'ave

enough men with chains in the grounds. Then there's the probing."

"The what?" asked de Bohun.

"The probing," answered his guest briefly. "That's a longer job, 'specially as I noticed that there's stone floors about. Now 'ere's another matter. Look at this carpet. That's Aubusson, that is. Ah, I notice everythink! Aubusson—that's what it is."

"Mr. Collop," broke in Marjorie, in her suffering. . . .

"Now, Miss," said Mr. Collop with command, "don't you *interrupt* me. Let me put the necessities before you. When you get all this done, sir, what are you to do, then? What are you to do next? Why, I'll tell you. You'll have all the shutters shut: I noticed you 'ad shutters: and those curtains pulled. Then you'll put what they call Marlin's New Irridiant up. That's the light we work by. And I'll tell you for why. You 'ave plain electrics in the room and they casts shadows. Don't they, Miss?" he appealed to his hostess. But before she could agree, he went on, like a mighty river in flood:

"Now, casting shadows, you might miss a small object. That's how objects do get missed. You've got to think of these things. Artificial light that is distributed high and in the corners. . . ."

The Home Secretary could bear no more. "Yes, yes, yes," he said. "Where does one get the stuff?"

"You'll see!" said Mr. Collop tartly, but with pardonable pride. "It's expensive, mind you," he added honestly. "But you got to do this job well or not at all."

"But, Mr. Collop," said poor Marjorie, who could hardly

bear another moment, "before all this expense couldn't we . . ."

"No, Miss," said the redoubtable Collop, shaking his head firmly. "Not to be thought on! I wouldn't undertake the responsibility, I wouldn't. And mind you, this ain't the first job of the sort I've tackled; not by thousands it ain't." (An exaggeration—due, I am afraid, to the whiskey.) "I wouldn't undertake the responsibility! "I'll put no man under a cloud till I've made certain that it's not lost and hiding of its own. If it's not found, why then it'll be time to begin."

It was Marjorie who found the decision to break off the battle. She got up suddenly.

"Good night, Mr. Collop," she said. "I understand all about it now. We leave it to you."

"Thanks, Miss," said Mr. Collop. "That's the right spirit! You leave it to the professional man, and you'll never regret it! Is it good night to you, sir?" he added in a voice as loud as ever, stretching out a firm hand and seizing that of the Home Secretary. He crushed it in an iron grip, so that the poor old gentleman winced with pain.

"No, Mr. Collop! . . . No, pray . . . I must see you again in a moment, indeed I must . . . but will you excuse me a moment?" He rose. "My daughter and I must have a private word together I think. . . ."

"It's my place to retire, my lord," said Mr. Collop all in the grand manner, weak in the distinctions. "I'll be in the library, and when you want me, why, come and cop me," and out he went.

Without a moment's warning, Marjorie threw herself upon a sofa, crossed her arms upon the back of it, and began

crying and sobbing in a storm. Her father was enormously distressed.

"There, there, my dear," he said, "you are quite overwrought; you are tired. Get to bed. It can't be helped. We must go through with it."

"Oh, papa," she sobbed, "it's intolerable. I can't help thinking! Just think what they'll all think!"

"Yes, my dear; I was thinking that they would be thinking what you say they will be thinking. I'm afraid some of them must have been thinking already."

"Perhaps," moaned poor Marjorie, half consoled by the relief of tears, "that b-b-b-loody b-b-beast will find the b-b-b-b-bloody thing after all."

"Yes, my dear, yes. I hope he will. I'm sure he will. I am indeed!"

She dried her eyes, sighed wearily, kissed her father good night, and went off to bed. It was nearly one o'clock. The poor man, as he heard her step go slowly up the great stairs, retained his daughter's despairing voice vividly in his ears. It reminded him of his wife's—only the vocabulary had somewhat changed since the days when Queen Victoria gave so admirable an example to the ladies of the land.

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He rose wearily, feeling fevered, and the worry on him increasingly intolerable. He stepped out into the hall; it was still fully lit. He rang, and when the servant came he asked him whether the offices were shut up. He was told that all had gone to bed but the man who had come at his summons. He bade him go in his turn, and put out all the lights. Then he himself switched out the bulbs in the

hall and stared at the great window beside the door. It was singularly light outside, and the air was oppressive within. Cold as was the weather, he needed to feel the open. He thrust up the sash and drank in the rush of freezing air.

The moon must have just risen, but a slight mist was ascending. Half an hour's light fall of snow had again marked off the lawn, but evidently hours before, since the paths were swept round the house and along up the avenue to the left. He shut down the sash again, a little refreshed, but still most ill at ease.

With a sigh he turned towards the door of the library, within which room, alone, crouched the nightmare policeman. He forced himself in, and found the fellow there.

"We must go into the West Room, Mr. Collop," he said. "My daughter has gone to bed; the house is all shut up, and we can discuss matters undisturbed. It is in the West Room that the thing happened. Come."

Chapter Twelve

N the West Room the Home Secretary opened fire on his guest.

"All these schemes of yours, Mr. Collop," he said firmly, "you must discard. Time is essential. I ask you for some immediate action. This very night. Mr. Collop, I beg you to proceed."

Mr. Collop needed no further invitation. Proceeding was his passion—I might almost say, his vice.

"Got to be done express?" he asked. "Right-o! Now I'll tell ye my way. I divide it," he continued, roaring powerfully, "into three heads." Then, much more loudly, "Head number one."

"Pray, pray, Mr. Collop," agonised the Home Secretary, with outstretched hands. "A little lower, please! We must not be overheard!"

"I'll tell you my express method—since ye want it express," said Mr. Collop, speaking now no louder than your ordinary street orator, railways guard or the cabinet minister at election. "First, to establish what I call negative evidence. This term," he added sententiously, "I will make clear in a moment. Two"—he ticked them off on his podgy fingers—"what I call the search, comparable to the experiment conducted by men of science; with no 'ypothetic bless you, none at all! Just random like. Now then, in the midst of that we shall find a clue. What then? Then number three. The 'ypothetic is formed, modified, re-

adjusted, co-ordinated, and leads infallibly to the inevitable conclusion."

He coughed and spat in the fire. It was perhaps the thirty-seventh time in the last ten years that he had recited that piece. It had been written out for him by his nephew, who, he was proud to say, attended lectures at Manchester University, and he had it typewritten on a now rather dirty sheet of paper which he carried about with him all over England.

"So what do we do now?" he continued heartily. "Why, we begin by establishing our negative evidence. Chrm! Chrm! And how do we do that? Why, we make sure that it is not in this room."

"But how can one make sure of that?" said the Home Secretary, puzzled.

"Why, plain and straightforward, sir. I 'ave brought down my men and my apparatus. We'll want the floor taken up. But that won't take long."

"What?" said the Home Secretary, in alarm.

"The floor, sir. The floor," said Mr. Collop magisterially. "And I say again, it won't take long. My men will prise it up before you can say 'Sir Garnet'! And afore we do that another set of 'em will cut the furniture open to see if it's not in the cracks. Then I have got two with the new white light."

"What?" said the Home Secretary again.

"Why, this new dazzle I told you on," said Mr. Collop proudly.

"But my dear sir, my dear sir, when you say your men, what do you mean?"

"My men, Mr. Dee Boe Hun? Why, them men I

ordered to come and 'elp me with this job. They're at the Lion now, waiting."

And without asking his host's leave, he sat down squarely at the little table by the telephone and rang up the Lion. When he had given his message, he waited, head in air, hands clasped behind his back, a monument of Induction and Deduction.

"Do I understand you to say," groaned Mr. de Bohun miserably, "that you mean to pull up the floor to-night?"

"That's it," nodded Mr. Collop. "That's right, And open the furniture. Only just enough to see it's not in any of the cracks. Then," he added, looking critically at the fine Empire looking-glass upon the wall, "we must have things down, of course. You never know what may lie concealed lurking behind."

"Really, Mr. Collop, really," groaned the Home Secretary, clasping and unclasping his hands, "I should think that . . ."

"Job must be done thorough," frowned Mr. Collop, wagging his head. "I'd never undertake the responsibility of searching indivdyals till I'd made sure 'twasn't in the room where 'twas lost."

Even as he spoke there came an honest bang upon the outer door; shortly after another, still more honest, upon the door of the room, and the shuffling of many feet. Once more dispensing with the formality of consulting his host, the great Collop unbolted the door, and with a Napoleonic gesture introduced his merry men.

They were a sight, they were! Six of them seemed to have been chosen rather for strength than for intellectual power. Two staggered under an enormous iron tripod

with heaven knows what contraption poised on its summit, and a cylinder of gas. Three more bore with them sundry instruments. And of all this little army Mr. Collop, with fine decision, took immediate charge.

"Now, then, lads!" he said; "hearty! The job's got to be done quick. All the rugs first, please. You two with the light, stand off! Stand on the window-sill. Then you won't be in the way." So they did, the marks of their heavy boots contrasting finely with the delicate woodwork of that Jane Austen room.

"Rugs all rolled?" said Mr. Collop. "Yes! That's right! Shake 'em first, yes! That's right! Pile 'em up on that other window. Now then, tables out of it! Smart!"

He opened the door, and behold! half a dozen willing pairs of hands pushed the small table, the middle table, the big desk, the little table, and the what-not, one after the other, vigorously into the hall—and the door was shut again.

"Now, me boys! up with the Austrians!"

His heart was in his work, and he inspired his command as all great leaders can. The sundry instruments so useful in work of this kind did their rapid work, lifting one large square after another, while the owner of the same danced with astonishing agility from spot to spot, remaining at last on one isolated island, which he was courteously bidden to abandon; taking refuge then upon the remaining low window-sill, while the five large lounge chairs in the room were laid carefully on their backs across the joists as the work proceeded.

"That's the style!" said Mr. Collop, cheerfully. "Pile 'em up, lads! Pile 'em up!"

And those sham-ancient polished parquet squares, their

very base modern pitch pine reverse pitifully exposed—but, as Mr. Collop proudly pointed out, not one of them broken—were carefully laid against the wall, nicely missing the Cox and the Morland, but threatening in some degree, should they shift or slip, the large picture of Paulings in the early eighteenth century, which was the place's pride—and so it ought to be! Paulings belonged to gentlemen then. Two of them were to be seen riding horses which had done nothing but eat for years and yet walked on their hind legs. They were followed by four dogs. . . .

But to my tale. . . .

The two citizens with the tripod set it down between the old dusty joists upon which the floor boards had rested, and of a sudden a most abominable glare, like the white heat from molten iron, shot in a shaft upon a corner in the uncovered lower flooring. It was brilliant beyond the dreams of avarice. It revealed like remorse. Mr. Collop with an agility surprising in a man of his build, leaped down that little distance, and kept on shouting directions.

"That's right now! Sweep it along! Sweep it along! Sweep it along!" The blinding shaft of light slowly traversed the edges of the shallow void from end to end, from left to right. "Now back again!" said Mr. Collop. "Now back again!"

The intense beam travelled back in another band, slightly nearer, from right to left; and all the while the detective followed with keen eyes every patch which it successively illuminated.

It was not a long process. Three or four minutes at the most. And while it continued, the Home Secretary, perched in security on his window-sill, was interested in spite of

himself: new science is always a toy. . . . And that was how they searched for the jewels in the flooring of the West Room.

Mr. Collop's hand went up, and the blinding shaft of light disappeared as suddenly as it had come.

"That'll do, lads!" he said. "We know one thing now, any'ow. It didn't get down through the flooring; that's certain. Now then, if you please, we'll open the furniture."

Mr. de Bohun did not please.

"Surely, surely it can be spared," he begged. "It's Victorian."

"Now, sir," protested Collop firmly, "I'll be responsible for nothing unless I'm pursuing my own method."

The Home Secretary sighed and surrendered. With deft fingers two of the three extras began picking out the stitching of the chairs after every loose cushion had been lifted, shaken, and put aside.

It was beautiful to see such expert work; at least, it was beautiful in Mr. Collop's eyes; but the Home Secretary almost shed tears. Those chairs were his father's! The Great Peal, the immortal Benjamin Israel, had graced them. And again—who was going to pay for all this? All the edges of the leather stood out; the secret places were revealed. There was no emerald.

Mr. Collop beamed with satisfaction.

"That, sir," he said triumphantly, "is the end of what we've called our *Negative* process. Hey! Number One!" And he ticked off on his thumb, as he had done before.

"We are now assured," he boomed, tucking his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, "that wherever the

Em'rald may be, it's not in this room. Stay a moment! I'd forgotten! The pictures down, please!"

Again the owner gave tongue. "Do you *really* think, Mr. Collop . . ."

"Yes, I do," answered Mr. Collop with decision. "Come. Smartly, lads!"

No harm was done to the pictures; they knew their work. The Cox was lifted down and now leaned at a secure angle. The Morland turned its back canvas to the ceiling, pushed on a capsized armchair. I wish I could say as much for the Napoleonic looking-glass.

It was just too high for one of the men's hands; he slipped, and down it came: an omen of ill-fortune, smashed upon the floor—round gilded frame, Eagle of the Legions, and all.

"Well, well!" said Mr. Collop cheerfully. "No battle without losses, ye know—hey?"

"I really think. . . ." urged the Home Secretary, with something as near anger as his temperament allowed.

"Never you fuss, sir," thrust in Mr. Collop genially. "It's all right now. We've proved our point. That's the 'sential. I say again, the Negative part is accomplished," and he smiled upon his chief with all the satisfaction of genius. "The em'rald's not in this room where it was lost. That's a cert. What's the conclusion? Why, sir, the conclusion is that it's *somewhere else*. And when I say somewhere else, what do I mean?"

"You mean. . . ." began the Home Secretary nervously, stepping down gingerly from his perch and trying to make his way across the joists—"you mean that you must now consider which, if any, of my guests . . ."

Again Mr. Collop's hand went up.

"Now, sir; pardon me! That's not the scientific spirit. I shall send these men back to the Lion, with your leave"—it was the first time he had asked it, and it was granted with enthusiasm—"and then I shall ask *you*, sir, to give me details, and I shall make notes. After that we'll sleep on it. . . . Before you go, men, get the Austrians down again. Hammer the clamps down: hammer 'em down good and strong at the corners; whang 'em in! You know how these Austrians buckle! We'll 'ave everything right again in a jiffy"—to his host—"and then we'll sleep sound on it. Like 'Ogs."

With clamouring echo which shook those ancient walls, square after square of Austrian antique was thrown back into its place; with Cyclopean noise the clamps were driven into their former holes, and the shattering bangs of the heavy iron hammers sounded like thunder through the silent night. Twenty yards away, in the small smoking-room, Victoria Mosel and Tommy Galton had remained to exchange a few insults after the others had gone off to bed. They started at the unusual din; she very slightly, he with a jerk.

"What are they doing?" said he suspiciously.

"Making your scaffold," shot Vic decidedly: then, more doubtfully. "It's a damned shame! For I don't suppose you *did* take it after all, Tommy? Eh?"

"If I thought there was room on you for that bloody stone," began Tommy viciously. . . .

"Oh, search me!" said Vic, without sincerity.

"No, but, Vic, what *are* they doing?"

"Shifting the scenery, Tommy. Summoning the dead. Christ knows!" She yawned, to the peril of her agglutina-

tive cigarette, but it held nobly. "It can't go on forever. I'm going to bed. By the time they've stopped I'll be asleep. So long! I'll come and look you up at Wormwood Scrubbs, never fear!" And the Virgin departed.

"Not while you're still in Holloway," fired the puller of horses after her as he got up in his turn, and went out to get his candle for bed.

A few moments later, when the Master of the House peeped out into the hall, he found all dark and deserted. He was pleased to think that his guests had suspected nothing.

When everything was accomplished, and the little army of Scotland Yard men had fallen back upon its billets at the Lion (Humphrey de Bohun himself let them out at the front door, on tiptoe and with agonised whispers entreating caution. He himself had locked and bolted these doors); when, I say, all this affair was over Mr. Collop, first making quite sure that his seat was secure, took out a notebook, shot a blot of ink on to the re-established polar bear, and gave tongue.

"Now, sir, fire away!"

"What do you want me to do?" said de Bohun doubtfully.

"Why, just give me details of what those coves 've been doing of," said Mr. Collop, relapsing into the vernacular.

"You mean my guests?" said the Home Secretary rather stiffly.

"That's right," said Mr. Collop cheerfully, "the toffs."

"Well, really. . . . I haven't played the spy on my guests, Mr. Collop."

"Oh, *I'm* looking arter that," said Mr. Collop with

another of his healthy winks. "Now, just you tell me all they did. I've got my first notes here. These three men what I've just met at dinner—and one of them's young McTaggart—I know 'im—they went down on their knees and they looked for it in that rug. Well and good. Then they got up, and they all swore they hadn't got it."

"McTaggart was the last," said de Bohun, defending the interests of the family.

"Ar? . . . I didn't know that!" mused the modern Napoleon deeply. And he noted it down. "Well, what next?"

"Why, to tell you the truth—the full truth, and I beg you to keep it private—my cousin, Lord Galton, has told me that he has *seen* the emerald—seen it with his own eyes—in the Professor's hands."

"Ar!" said Mr. Collop again. "That's important, that is!" and down it went. "Saw it with 'is own eyes: where and 'ow?"

"Wait a moment, Mr. Collop, wait a moment. Not long after, the Professor told me he had infallible scientific proof that it was in McTaggart's pocket. He showed me the very instrument wherewith he had been able to discover its presence through the thickness of the coat."

"That's important too!" murmured Mr. Collop, intelligently noting it down. "An' what does McTaggart say?"

"McTaggart . . ." The Home Secretary was about to blurt out the truth and tell him what McTaggart had singularly announced. But he checked himself. To insult his last remaining prop would be fatal. "Oh, Mc-

Taggart?" he evaded. "Why, McTaggart said he hadn't got it."

"Ar! just so. 'E did, did 'e? Now, that's *very* important," affirmed Mr. Collop, and he noted that down also.

"Now here," he continued, slipping an elastic band over the notebook and putting it back into his pocket—"here, Mr. Dee Boe Hun, we 'ave got three 'ypothetics." He again began ticking them off on the thumb and fingers of the left hand. "First 'ypothetic: Lord Galton stole the em'rald. Second 'ypothetic: Old Giglamps stole the em'rald . . . Tortoise-shell specs, I mean: the schoolmaster," and he winked again. "Third 'ypothetic: McTaggart stole the em'rald. Now these three 'ypothetics," he went on, "lead to three totally different conclusions. Each of 'em has its conjunctions and conjugations. Mr. Dee Boe Hun," he concluded, rising and assuming hieratic tones, "I shall not sleep to-night." (There is many a true word spoken in lying.) "I shall bend all the energies of me mind in the ensuing hours of darkness, and on the morrow you shall 'ave my conclusions. . . . I'll trouble you, sir, to leave me a syphon and a drop o' something. Helps me to concentrate."

"I'm afraid," said the Home Secretary, "the servants will have cleared the drinks away from the library, and they have all gone to bed." Then, terrified lest the lack of sustenance should imperil victory, he added hurriedly: "Don't move! Pray don't move! I think I know where to find it."

He was away some time, going on tiptoe in the offices. When he returned it was with an unopened bottle of

whiskey, a syphon and a glass. "I'm afraid I have no corkscrew," he apologised.

"I 'ave," said the imperturbable Collop, who had sat royally in his chair to receive this tribute. He pulled out the cork, smelt the brand, approved of it, poured himself out a dope and a most miserable little splash from the syphon.

"Here's luck!" he said. "Cheerio! Now you leave me to it!"

And de Bohun left him to it, ardently praying with what was left of his childhood's faith to a God in whom he still vaguely believed, that never again in the remaining years of his declining life should he be compelled to harbour under the roof of Paulings any unit from the mighty Secret Service which he commanded, and inwardly deciding that he would relinquish that command for India, Paris, South Africa—nay, New Zealand—anything rather than bear such a burden again.

Chapter Thirteen

T IS a fascinating occupation to watch a powerful human brain at work upon some great problems—the face alive with mind, the tension of the muscles, the frowning eyes; and to feel behind it all that driving, compelling power of the intelligence wherein man is God-like.

But no one would have seen this sight in the case of Mr. Collop had he remained. What he would have seen was a hand pouring out whiskey for itself over and over again and adding smaller and smaller splashes of soda; and at last an obese body attempting sleep in the lounge chair which it filled.

He had comfortably made up his mind. He was going to stay in the West Room and sleep as he could, leaving his bed untouched by way of giving the impression of a long night's intellectual wrestling. Next morning he would take every one of the three in turn, tell each separately that he was from the Yard, tax them brutally with the theft, and terrify and bully the culprit, whichever of the three it might turn out to be, into confession. So decided, he chose a good chair among the mutilated victims, wheeled it close to the electric switches by the fire, settled himself down, turned off the light and shut his eyes for sleep.

Now it is paradoxically true of the substantial more than it is of the insufficient, that they must shift and turn to find

that posture in which their persons can best repose, especially in chairs. Nor could Mr. Collop at once and easily fall into the arms of Morpheus. He shifted and turned, and wedged in and re-wedged in and out, and moved again and replaced those various muscles and anatomical names of which escape me—or rather I never knew them, though the things themselves I know well enough—when all of a sudden he gave a loud and piercing cry and leapt up broad awake. Something had stuck into him—something abominably sharp. His reaction had been instantaneous. He struck a match. He switched on the light.

He groped in the offending tail-coat pocket and—not the first to do so!—stared at what he found in his hand—the emerald! Its brooch setting was unclasped, the wicked steel pin of it was pointing at a challenging angle in the air. He glared viciously at the offending point which had wounded his innocent person; then his eyebrows relaxed into a stupefied stare at the stone itself.

“Great God!” he said three times, “Great God! Great God!”

There is a current impression, taken I think from the great spate of detective stories upon which we are all fed, that your professional detective has no brains whatsoever and would be no match for the sloth of the Andes, or the sluggish waddle-duck of Australian and Imperial fame. It is an error. They are men as we are and their intelligences, such as they are, work more or less under the spur of prospective advantage. Within three minutes Mr. Collop had grasped the fact that fame, security, promotion, a permanent, good, appreciated, livelihood lay in his outstretched



Birds of the Empire.
I.—The Parrot Attaboy, in action.

palm. Had he not found the emerald? *How* he had found it, why it was there at all, he knew not. But he had quickly seen how its possession might be used.

"There you are, you great blighter," he murmured, addressing the charming gem. "Damn your green eyes! I'll make you work, I will! William, my boy, here's something that's got to be thought out!"

For the first time for many months, Mr. Collop thought, really thought; "concentrated" as he would have put it.

He would have done it better perhaps if he had not been so full of whiskey. But shock is a powerful stimulus. And he was already three-quarters sober and coming to conclusions.

For a long time the effect of this unusual exercise was a blank and a confusion of mind; then there broke in upon the silence a sound which startled him horribly. A voice, somewhat muffled, uncertain, had spoken in that silence where none but him could be. He had heard it! Or was he mad?

"Attaboy!"

Was it a divine command? Had some dear wraith of the dead—his sainted mother perhaps, who could tell—come to comfort him in this dread hour of his fate? All was dead still. His hand trembled a little as he pulled out his watch. It was a quarter past two, and the silence was enormous.

Most awfully it came again.

"Attaboy!"

He hardly dared to look around. Look round he did, and there he saw what he had not before grasped—that the

dome of black cloth, suspended, covered a cage; thence it was that once again, but this time in a failing, drowsy manner, came the unearthly summons:

"Attaboy!"

A revelation burst upon his mind. It was a revelation indeed! The whole scheme blazed suddenly before him.

He walked boldly to the cage, took off the cover and saw what may very properly be called the blinking bird, for the sudden light had dazzled it.

"Attaboy!" croaked the parrot again in a rather peevish fashion.

"I'll Attaboy you!" hissed Mr. Collop through his teeth.

He made his preparations to capture that innocent accomplice; his scheme was now fully developed.

He had heard that this kind of fowl was of a very fierce and dangerous sort; but the plan must be pursued at all risks. He took his handkerchief from his pocket—a large bandanna of the noblest—and with a decision worthy of a better cause, whipped it round the gaudy coloured neck after the fashion of a cravat. A muffled protest proceeded from that insulted organ.

"You wait!" muttered Mr. Collop vindictively, as though the poor bird were his enemy. He looked about him. There was a large square of black cloth on his host's writing-table. With that he made a second deadener, hoodlike, entirely covering the animal's head, and tied it securely on; all that now penetrated from within was a faint, varying sound which one had to be in the closest neighbourhood to hear. Next he cut off a piece of tape from the coil neatly disposed by the side of the official papers, and bound the

fierce talons securely. Then with infinite precaution he slipped off the chain from its ring, and held the exotic biped firmly in both hands.

The clipped wings fluttered a little, but they were contained by strong hands. Mr. Collop made for the window. He laid his living parcel down, where it struggled in vain; opened the shutters with infinite precautions for avoiding sound—above, Aunt Amelia, happily deaf, was deep in slumber; pulled up the sash so slowly that it seemed an age; went back on tiptoe, extinguished the light and—a stroke of genius—went noisily upstairs, bearing the parrot, to give full warning to anyone who might be still awake that he had gone to bed, after all. He tumbled his bed about. He returned.

He came down gingerly in shoeless feet, and stepped out into the night.

The stillness was awful, but all propitious to his plan. The thin snow lay even and spotless on the grass on either side of the avenue. The nearer trees were clear in the half light. The gravel walk, though well swept and clear of snow, leaving no trace of his passage, was bitterly cold to his thinly clad feet—for his socks were of silk, I am glad to say.

There was a wintry mist and beyond it the white suffused radiance of the moon.

He looked up cautiously. There was not a chink of light in any window. All slept, and the Holy One presided in the heavens above, beyond the fog in her blurred aureole of light. It was the hour for great deeds. And a great deed was done.

Mr. Collop, with infinite precautions, lifted up his captive and planted its two talons firmly upon the snow to the side of the swept alleyway and pointing at a small, most aged and somewhat stunted oak about thirty yards ahead of him on the edge of the swept path. He himself kept crouching on the swept gravel and holding poor Attaboy to the side above the snow. Then, still creeping noiselessly along, he planted the bird's claws down again about six inches further. And so on, hop by hop.

It was merciful in Providence to have spared that tropical exile any too sensitive nerves in its claws; but it protested. It thought the march an indignity, and it was abominably cold. The parrot squirmed. The parrot resisted. But the parrot was for it.

Six inches by six inches the double imprint of the claws appeared in a lengthening chain upon the thin snow until they had come to within ten feet of the oak. Then did Mr. Collop most cautiously rise from his stoop and, taking the bird under his left arm and standing upon tiptoe, stretch his right hand up to a small hollow in the stump of a branch that had decayed long ago: he felt its concavity. It would do. He carefully felt for the emerald in (now) his waistcoat pocket. It was safe. He turned back swiftly towards the great dark house in the moonlight.

The thing was accomplished.

As stealthily as he had come, but far more rapidly, thanking Heaven that still no light showed through any cranny of the mansion, he loped back, shut the window down again with infinite precautions and even then dreaded a slight sound, put his dumb confederate back, released it

of its bandages, slipped on the cover of the cage, and crept up to bed.

So true it is that once in every man's life comes an opportunity and that in every man some talent, however unsuspected, lurks.

Chapter Fourteen

UNDAY morning had dawned brilliant, had grown in splendour. The mist had gone. A low but clear and even glorious sun flashed heaven athwart the snowy levels and transfigured the winter sky.

The Home Secretary came down to breakfast late, and no wonder! Marjorie came down to breakfast late, and no wonder! Tommy and Vic came down late, and no wonder! The Professor and Aunt Amelia had met at the table before anyone else was about. If she expected a flirtation, she was disappointed. If he expected a quiet reading of the Sunday newspaper, he was more bitterly disappointed still. The advent of the late comers was a relief.

Last of all drifted in, heavy-eyed but big with mastery achieved, the Collop.

At that breakfast very little was said. McTaggart was getting used to the rich. He lit a pipe. But he stood mum.

Victoria Mosel and Tom Galton met in Marking Room.

"Vic," said Tommy Galton, "who do you think has got it?" He lounged back in the absurdly low, fat chair, letting himself go all loose, as is the habit of your hard-riding man—especially those who pull horses—and looking down at her calves after the admirable breeding of our day.

"*You* haven't, anyhow, Tommy!" lisped Victoria Mosel, in spite of the hanging cigarette. "I've got that much!"

"Thank God for that! Spread it!" said Galton.

"Thank me, too," said Vic.

"All right. Thank *you*, too. Damn you! Who's got it?"

Victoria Mosel turned round, spat the fragment of the cigarette into the fire, and lit another one.

"I'm thinking," she said.

"The natural thing," said Galton, shutting his eyes, "would be that putrid fella McTaggart: the journalist fella!"

"*He* hasn't got it," said Vic decidedly. "And he's not so putrid, either. Nothin' like as putrid as you are!"

"That's neither here nor there. He's putrid, all right. Shall I tell you who's got it?"

"You don't know," said Vic. "Lie away."

"Old Footle's got it," said Tommy, with decision. "Cousin Bill. It may be sewn into his sagging skin: but he's got it."

Victoria Mosel looked at him curiously through her half-closed buttonhole eyes.

"Go on!" she said.

"I saw him take it," said Galton. "I saw him with my own eyes."

"And you told the chief, I suppose?" said Vic, with a sneer.

"Yes, I told him," answered Tommy determinedly.

"More fool you!" said Vic, sighing. "He hasn't. Old Bill hasn't got it, Tommy. . . . I've been watching you all since Collop came under this accursed roof. The Don's not oppressed. It's not with *him*. *He* hasn't got it."

"Well, then, who *has*, Vic? Damn it, who *has*?" savagely.

Then did Victoria Mosel open her eyes wide, as wide as cigar-shaped eyes can open, and look at the questioner; next she folded her lids into a most natural slit of repose, and turned her gaze to the ceiling, saying:

"Look here, Tommy, I've told you already that *you* haven't got it, and that ought to be enough for you. *You* ought to be grateful. In fact, you *were* grateful just now. Only gratitude's short-lived."

"I believe you've got the stinking brooch, Vic," said her cousin (by marriage) surlily.

"You said that before—and I said, search me! I wish to Christ I had," said Vic. "I'd hand it on through Baba to the van Burens next time Archie went to Amsterdam. They'd know what to do with it! I should get it back in four pieces. They'd keep the fifth—but I'd net a bellyful!"

The young man got up from his lounge and stood surlily with his hands in his pockets.

"It's got to be found!" he said.

"It'll be found all right," assured Vic deliberately. "And who'll be relieved then, my boy?" And she dug a lean elbow with maidenly modesty under his fifth rib.

"Go to hell!" shouted the goaded Tommy. He intended to convey, after his fashion, that the conversation was closed.

He sauntered out of the room and Victoria Mosel, who always liked a warm chair in winter, sank back into the seat he had abandoned. She lit her third cigarette, the fifteenth of that morning, and shut her eyes to think over the matter fully. She had been up late the night before and Sunday morning is a good time for repose. She fell into a

lounging little self-sufficient sleep, and snored in a gentle fashion, not unmusical . . . dear Victoria!

And that was the end of the judgment passed by one select—and small—section of the governing classes upon a problem so closely concerning them all.

But the moment of revelation had come. Mr. Collop dared not stay, lest sure steps should obliterate the unwilling traces of Attaboy across the snow.

"None of 'em going to church, I hopes?" said he to his host after breakfast.

"Surely! Surely some one," was all the Victorian could say.

"Well," brutally, "none of 'em can. They've all got to be here together. We want every witness, sir; every one. . . . *I've found the emerald!*"

"What? Eh! What!" staggered Humphrey de Bohun.

"*I've found the emerald!*" repeated the policeman enormously. ". . . Leastways, I've found where it is."

"What am I to do?" begged the statesman, all of a flutter. "What are your plans? It's urgent! Innocent men must be cleared!"

"Orl in good time!" pronounced the majestic Collop. "Orl in good time! First tell 'em there's no church this morning. Go and tell 'em that. Soak into 'em all. I've got to 'ave my witnesses—and you'll be glad, too, when it's over."

In his heart the Victorian relic, bleeding though he was from such a manner, felt that he would. . . . Anything to get it over!

"I've got a word to say to you, Sir Humphrey"—it was

no longer "My lord"—"afore we summons 'em, and then you shall see what you shall see. Meanwhile, you go and tell 'em to stand by. I'll bide 'ere."

And he bided, while the far wealthier and therefore greater man trotted round on his errand.

"I'm sorry," he said to each couple, as he ferreted it out, "but I must ask you not to go out. *The emerald's found*; at least . . . you'll see. Only wait where you are just a moment. I'll send for you all."

He repeated that phrase three times and fixed them to their stations; then he ran back to the deliverer.

He found the deliverer at the door of the West Room.

"Come in here, Mr. Dee Boe Hun," he said. "Look round, Sir Humphrey—what do you perceive?"

"Nothing," said the Home Secretary. Then he found the manhood to add, "Hurry up!"

"Ar! 'Urry up, is it?" said the masterful policeman deliberately. "Now there's a little point to be settled first." He compressed his lips, as though for a reprimand to an inferior. "The first thing that's got to be proved—and that's simple—is, was there a winder left open here the night o' the great disaster?"

"You mean on Friday night? The day before yesterday? The night the jewel was dropped?"

"Yep!" answered Mr. Collop. "I do."

"A window?" repeated the statesman, remembering the shutters, the curtains, the fire, all the scene.

"A winder was left open," insisted bovinely Mr. Collop. "I'll lay to that. And if you'll settle that p'int you'll see 'ow the rest'll follow. I tell you I 'ave me clue; it's more than a clue; it's a find. Ye'll see!"

The mechanism of a great house (delightful thought!) involves a hierarchy. The Home Secretary rang, and asked for the butler. An underling sought Mr. George Whaley, and Mr. George Whaley arrived. There was that in his eye which might have alarmed or warned the Head of the de Bohuns; but the Head of the de Bohuns was passing weary in the head just now, and he noted nothing.

"Oh!" he said, "I wanted you, Whaley . . . to ask you—er—whether . . . yes, to ask you who it is who does the room here in the early morning? Who, for instance, would be in the room here, say, well, before anybody else?"

George Whaley coughed discreetly.

"By rights, sir," he said, "it ought to be Annie. But it is possible, of course, that the Boy——"

"Ah! yes," said the Home Secretary. "The Boy. Of course!" He had vaguely heard that the Boy was the servant of the servants of the gods. "Well then, you think it would be the Boy? Send me the Boy!"

"Very good, sir," said George Whaley. But as there had been that in his eyes, so there was now that in his more manly gesture, as he turned round to pass majestically through the door, which might have warned once more, his master that he, George Whaley, had acquired new powers. There was a sense of approaching equality with the Great in George Whaley's waddle as he went through the door. From the mere dependent he was attaining the higher and political rank of blackmailer. But all these indications fell without effect upon the jaded de Bohun.

The Boy appeared. He stood at attention, after a fashion he had seen at the pictures. He stared with gooseberry eyes

at his employer. The head of the de Bohuns was kind to him.

"Look here, boy," he said. "Look here. I've got to ask you something. Did you open a window in this room, or leave it open, or find it open, yesterday, Saturday morning—eh? Were you here before anybody else—eh? You understand what I mean. Did you open a window, or any window, or find one open—eh?"

The boy Ethelbert, standing as stiff as a poker and on the verge of tears, gave tongue.

"I ain't done nuthin'!" he said. "Don't yer say I took that em'ral'! I never did! I never set eyes on it. Don't you say that. It ain't true. I knows no more about it than the child unborn, what's in the Good Book."

The Head of the House was annoyed.

"Who's saying you did, you little fool? All I want to know is, whether the window was open?"

"I never touched it!" complained the youth more loudly still, and stiffer than ever, but with tears already gathering in his eyes. "I never did! So 'elp me Gawd! I couldn't tell it from a chunk o' cheese. I don't know what it looks like. I wish I may die. I wish I may drop down dead 'ere an' now!"

Collop, the policeman, took charge.

"Look 'ere, me lad," he said in the fine bullying voice of his noble trade, "none o' that! Did yer leave the window open, or 'ave yer seen it open?"

"Oo're you?" perked Ethelbert, stunned to boldness by terror, though still at attention. "Mr. de Bones 'e's my master; not you!" Then turning to that master, he continued, "I tell you, sir, straight honest from the shoulder,

I'm a British lad, I am, so help me Gawd as made me own sweet self and little apples. I swear I never seen the thing."

"Look here, child," said Mr. de Bohun in a final sort of fashion, "was there a window open or was there not?"

"No, sir, there was nawt."

"Why the hell couldn't you say that before?" muttered the politician. "You're sure there was not?" he added. "Was there a catch undone?"

"Never mind about the catch," broke in Collop. "Time'll show that doesn't matter."

"There wasn't a window open, sir, at all, till I opened one, sir," said the Boy, "to let in Gawd's fresh air—which is orders."

"Oh, you *did* open one then?" said his master.

"Yes, sir!" said Ethelbert, still at attention.

"Ah! *Now* we're getting on!" said Collop. "That's what I always said. A winder was opened! Eh? A winder was opened! Now you mark me," he went on, turning to his host and tapping the palm of his round left hand with the stubby forefinger of his right. "That's another clue. A winder was open."

"Don't you dare say I touched it!" from the distraught Ethelbert.

"You shut yer mouth, boy," answered Collop without courtesy. "Tell him to shut his mouth, sir—tell him plain. He's distracting me."

"But there's some on us," went on Ethelbert desperately, refusing to shut that mouth, "as might speak if we knew. . . ."

"Ah, now," said de Bohun eagerly. "Do you hear that,

Mr. Collop? Do you hear that? The Boy may reveal . . .”

Collop stepped in between. “Pay no attention, Mr. Dee Boe Hun. I got my clue, and we mustn’t ’ave no cross scents. You take me?”

“Well,” said his host, legitimately nettled, “I don’t see any harm in getting whatever evidence we can.”

“Ah, and you’re right there,” said young Ethelbert, still at attention. “And what’s that sime hevidence, eh? That’s what I say, sir. Hevidence—as clear as daylight, from them as knows. There’s some as could speak if they would, and some as knows what others doesn’t know. It isn’t always them as needs things most as pinches ’em. And maybe, times, it’s them as needs ’em least as pinches ’em!” He lowered his voice and mysteriously added, “The ’ighest!”

“Look here, Boy,” said de Bohun, fatigued with such recitals: “if you’ve got anything to say, say it. Mr. Collop and I are pressed.”

“What I’ve got to say,” answered Ethelbert, with a solemnity beyond his years, “is plain enough, I tike it. ’Oo’s to blame? Mum’s the word. But there’s some in this house that’s ’igher than others. And ’oo’s the ’ighest? A lord, I tike it?”

“Do you mean Lord Galton, child?” said the peer’s cousin, sharply. “Are you saying Lord Galton took the Emerald?”

“I’ve named no names,” said Ethelbert, trembling between fear and importance. “But this I do say, and it is . . .”

“Have you any evidence against Lord Galton?”

"Now, Mr. Dee Boe Hun," urged Mr. Collop with decisive hands. "Now, *please* don't let's 'ave a cross scent."

The Home Secretary waved him aside. The family was concerned.

"What have you got against—or about—Lord Galton? Say what you have to say, and let's have it over."

"What I've got to say," said the Boy, "is what is but my plain duty to say. I names no names. I asks no questions and I don't get told no lies!"

"Upon my word!" cried his master angrily, almost moved to action. The boy Ethelbert at the end of so long a tension gave a loud cry of terror and suddenly whipped round and fled through the open door.

They were disconcerted.

"Well, Mr. Collop," said Mr. de Bohun on the child's vanishing, "that's another complication. It's Lord Galton now!" and he sank into a chair. Things were becoming too much for him.

"Don't you believe 'im," said Mr. Collop firmly. "What I say is, no cross scents. What do 'ounds do when they find a cross scent?"

Mr. de Bohun would have been only too happy to tell him, but he had never hunted.

"Why, they miss the right one. That's wot they do. And do they catch the fox? No. A thousand times, no! Now," said he, again tapping that palm of his with that forefinger of his. "You mark! Forget all about Lord Galton. It's servant's romancing. I told you I already 'ad one clue. And 'ere I've gone and got *another* clue! An' they both fit in. . . . And now," he added peculiarly, gazing out of the window as though he would admire the wintry

morning with its clear scintillating skies, "I'd have you note another clue. Look there," he said—and with the gesture of Hannibal pointing out the plains of Italy, Mr. Collop extended his left arm and directed his somewhat too thick forefinger towards the avenue and the sheets of snow on either side of the great gravel walk. "What have we there?" he said.

De Bohun, weary after his sleepless night, had to get up again from his chair and look where he was bidden. "I . . . I don't see anything, Mr. Collop," he said.

"No," said Mr. Collop indulgently. "You wouldn't. It wants a trained eye. Now, you'll excuse me, sir, but if you 'ad been in the Yard as I 'ave, and as long as I 'ave, you'd see something. It's only a fine indication, like, but your mind would leap to it. At least mine 'as. Do you notice any marks on that snow?"

Mr. de Bohun honestly said he could not—nor could any man have seen any from where he stood.

"I certainly see no footprints," he said.

"Footprints o' wot?" answered Mr. Collop. "Footprints o' 'uman beings? Man and woman? Leastways boots? Nah!" and he shook his head. "You want . . . you want your eyes better skinned than that in *our* trade, if you'll excuse me saying it. Shall I *tell* you what's there? I can see it."

His host was justly irritated. "Well, I can't," he exploded. "What *is* there?"

Mr. Collop leant over, made a shell of his hand and whispered in a voice to wake the dead:

"Footprints of a fowl! Leastways," he added hurriedly,

"not a domestic fowl, I mean. But a bird. A bird's been there!" he added, nodding solemnly.

"Well, what of it?" said the last of the de Bohuns, still more irritated.

"Ah! You'll see!" said Mr. Collop, in a tone of great equality.

He stepped back, pulled his waistcoat down over his paunch, passed his hand cavalierly over his abominable moustache, and gave an order—as though he were master—for he now felt himself securely in the saddle.

"Summon 'em here," he said, with a large wave of his right hand, "summon 'em all. It's accomplished!"

"Summon who?"

"Me feller guests," said Mr. Collop. "They shall witness the *daynoumong* and their souls shall be eased."

"Mr. Collop," said the harassed Home Secretary, "what need is there for this?"

"Witnesses! Mr. Dee Boe Hun!" royally. "Record! You'll be astonished."

"Very well, Mr. Collop, if you require them."

He made a gesture as though again to ring; then thought better of it and went out himself, looking at his watch as he moved to the door. He had seen no one go out. It was not yet half past ten o'clock: no one would yet have started for church. He remembered with pleasure that for once in her life Victoria Mosel had come to breakfast. He ferreted them all out, McTaggart cowering as usual—and very sad—in the old smoking-room; Galton and Vic, whom he surprised in the very act of repeating the word "putrid," he found in the library, already stale with smoke; Aunt Amelia he dragged out, almost by force, from the corner of the little

morning-room where she was sitting, half somnolent, like the good mutton she was, her knitting laid aside on the Holy Day and wondering by the clock whether it was time for her to put on her bonnet (help!) for church. The Professor he had the good luck to catch at the very last moment as he was making for the glass doors of the hall, all ready muffled up for a walk. As for Marjorie, he had to go and find her in her room where she was desperately locked in, miserable.

"Mr. Collop has got something to tell us, my dear. Won't you come down?"

"Blast him!" came in tearful, broken tones from within.

"No, my dear, but please do come down. He really wants us all."

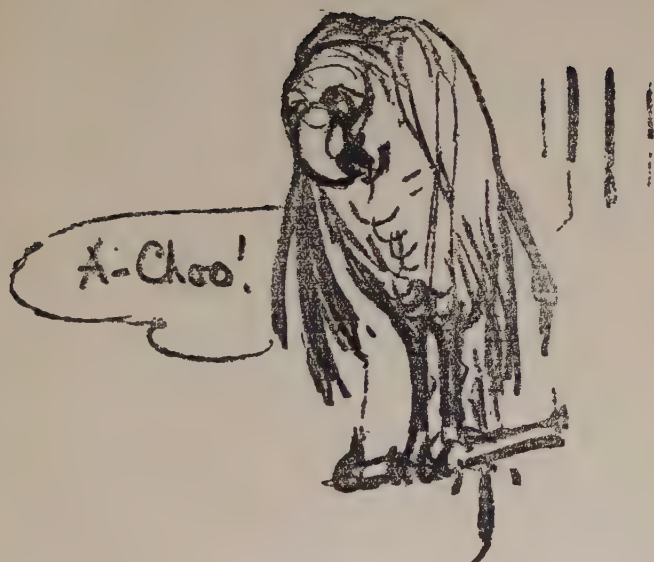
"I don't believe it's any use—no use at all, the rotter!" broke out that tearful voice.

"Marjorie, dear, please come."

"Very well"—with a grunt from within—"but it's no use!"

So the shepherd got his flock together. He was in a strange mood that the occasion was ceremonial, and he felt a fool. He almost counted heads as he roped in his little herd. They were all there. They filtered into the West Room, expecting little, and annoyed in their various ways; Marjorie hideous with recent tears, Aunt Amelia almost baa-a-ing, the Professor inept, McTaggart desperately out of place, the puller of horses more sullen than ever, and ah! the triumphant Victoria Mosel, cool as the woodland goddess of old songs—but smoking.

They stood huddled in the West Room under that Sunday morning light, looking on the ravaged furniture, the



Birds of the Empire.
II.—The Parrot Attaboy, out of action.

staring pink circle where the now demolished glass had saved the paper from fading, the Parrot's cage—but gazing above all on the immortal Collop and awaiting his great news.

In that solemn and expectant silence—the chimes for church were ringing—the parrot sneezed three times, with a grievance, and very hoarsely muttered “Attaboy!” and shivered. It had a cold in the head.

Nor did Lord Galton wince—though that parrot had suddenly revealed to him a world of things about his cousin's conversations when his back was turned.

Chapter Fifteen

 R. COLLOP was standing dramatically in the midst of that large apartment, a squat tower of triumphant modesty and unassailable success.

"I asked His Honour, Mr. Dee Boe Hun, to bring you all in," he said, as though they were a school, "so's ye might see how things like this are *done*. It's the end of what's been troubling you all; what's been biting you! Oh! I know your distress," he added kindly, fixing Galton with his eye first, then the Professor. "But first and to start with, I 'ave a confession to make, I 'ave. Ye thought me His Majesty's representative in Bogotar, just returned." He smiled genially. "Ar! ye thought that, and nat'rally enough. Well, now, I'm free to tell ye the truth. An' in *my* trade," he went on, crossing his arms boldly, "that's not too often, Gawd helping us! Now 'oo am I? I'm from the Yard. In plain English, I'm what they call a detective. Now don't start!" he added, releasing his left hand and holding it up. Nor had any of them started, least of all Aunt Amelia, who had not clearly heard the last words. "There's no 'arm done, there's none o' you to blame. There's none o' you suspect. You'll none o' you have the darbies on," he added, with kindly jocularly. "Oo's done it?"

"I'm sure, I'm sure, I'm sure . . ." began the Professor with ready tongue.

"You'll excuse *me*, Professor," said Mr. Collop with dignity, "but I must continue. Ah! 'oo's done it, I arsk? The question we 'ave all on us been arsking. And now"—with mysterious dignity—"ye shall see. If any of ye is for wrapping up before ye go out of doors say so. It's only a little turn."

No one was for wrapping up before going out of doors. They were getting intrigued.

"Foller me," said Mr. Collop after the fashion of the great leaders of mankind. He threw open the window towards the avenue and heavily straddled himself out. The Professor's long legs followed; young Lord Galton, a good deal bored, with his hands in his pockets, took it at a stride; Marjorie's short skirts negotiated it; McTaggart tried to jump it, hit his head on the sash, rubbed it, and then more sensibly walked across. As for Vic, she put a bony hand upon the sill and vaulted lightly over. Poor Aunt Amelia stood looking after them in vain, like the women of Ithaca when first the king sailed away to the gathering of the chiefs and of whom it is written:

"This is the hall where all the women spinning
Sang of the Kings who sailed away to Troy."

She could not vault; she could not even stride. Lastly, the Home Secretary himself hooked a lean shank over and stood with the shivering group. Outside they all came on to the swept gravel of the avenue, with its row of bare trees and its border of broad snow on either side. Mr. Collop with a gesture still more majestic than any he had yet assumed, pointed with iron hand and arm at the light snow which covered the grass upon the right. There, sure enough, was

the mark of a bird's claw. And side by side with it, the other triple mark of the bird's other claw.

"A bird 'ops," pontificated Mr. Collop, significantly. "'E don't run—'cept ostriches and such like. 'E 'ops. Foller me!"

His left hand slightly clenched, with his right he pointed down continuously to the border of the snow, whence, at short intervals, those two triple marks appeared and re-appeared.

"Mark you," said Mr. Collop, facing the group—the now half-frozen group. "I said, a bird 'ops. What 'opped 'ere? A bird!"

They approached the fatal tree.

"And 'ere," said Mr. Collop in the tone of a guide conducting a party of tourists, "our marks are lost. And for why? 'E takes the air! Whither will 'e take the air? Put ye'self in his place. Whither would a bird take the air from hence, seeing what fatal burden 'e bore in 'is beak?" He half waved, half pointed, with his left hand at the hollow-branched stump just higher than their heads and some ten feet away. "Foller me," he said again.

They followed him—but not to the point of going on the snow, which Mr. Collop did with great courage and resolution. He stood on tiptoe by the trunk and stretched his clenched left hand upward, groped with it hidden to the wrist in the hollow of the rotten branch, lifted it out again high between them and the frosty January sky. There held between the thumb and forefinger, unmistakable, recovered, was the Emerald.

"What did I tell yer?" he waved triumphantly in that keen air. "Brains, gentlemen . . . ladies *and* gentlemen, I

mean. . . . Brains! Induction." And he calmly slipped the gem into his pocket.

Had they been in a warm room they would have applauded: it was so exactly like the best tricks. But they were cold. They huddled back. It was only twenty or thirty yards; they would be in the warmth again in a moment.

I know very well that there ought to have been a shock of surprise. A cheer. Excitement. What you will. But, Lord! it was so cold!

One by one they clambered, straddled, strode, vaulted, crawled and shambled over the low window ledge and back into the room. Mr. Collop came last, and slammed the window down behind him: and Aunt Amelia welcomed them as might the old nurse of Ulysses when he returned at last from so much wandering. As the warm air revived them they began to feel him, very rightly, a hero.

"Now," said he, "shall I show ye all 'ow these things are done? Step by step, unbeknownst to others? Ah! It's worth knowing! Look 'ere," and he began, their interest rising as their blood began to move again: "You mayn't see it, but I see it, here on this parky floor." He stooped down and tapped it with his finger. "Little marks. Little marks."

There were no little marks—but no matter. He had done his best to suggest them. The Professor greatly helped them by his folly.

"Yes! I see! Oh! Yes! Most interesting! I see them now!"

"And where does they lead? Why, to the winder. Then what did I say to myself? I ses, 'A bird! A daw!' And mark you, gentlemen—ladies and gentlemen, I mean—I

didn't come to that blindly, either. For you'll pardon me, but I know what you'd all said."

The guests looked—or at least, most of them did—at their host. But he was modestly regarding the carpet.

"I know as 'ow you 'ad, all or most of you, felt suspected like and might well enough think you could each o' ye be certain which o' ye it was. And ye were wrong," he continued, wagging his head solemnly. "Orl wrong! It was but an innocent bird. Or a thievish bird. Any'ow—a bird. That's what it was—a bird. When I 'eard of your confusion from our good host here"—and again Mr. de Bohun looked anyhow—"I says to meself, 'They're innocent, they are!' That was my first clue. Orl innocent," he emphasized cheerily, nodding in a nice heartening way to McTaggart, the Professor and young Galton, the last of whom said, almost audibly, to Vic, "The stinker!" and to whom Vic whispered back, "Well, he found it, anyhow!"

"Orl innocent," went on Mr. Collop. "Orl as white as the driven snow. And 'oo set things right and proved you so? Why, yours truly. . . . First, arter I'd thought 'ard orl night, I looks by the first white o' morning at the parky—and sure enough I sees them faint prints on the wax, like: an' them near the winder. What are the birds as thieves? Why, daws! Now, ladies and gentlemen, daws 'as claws; talons, ye may call 'em, of a 'ighly partic'lar kind. It's our business in my trade to know orl we can—and I can tell a daw's claws from any other claws, or paws . . . any other in the wide world.

"So wot does I do? In this same early morning, afore any one of ye were up—at any rate, afore any of yer had showed themselves, I was out trailing. Sure enough, there

I found where the bird had gone, for I marked his prints on the snow. When I found where the bird 'ad 'opped to, I follered to where he'd sat on the air. When I found where he'd taken the air, what does I do? Did I say to myself, 'E 'as flown far, far away; give up the search, William Collop? You are proven right, but the hem'rald will not be seen again by mortal eye.' Did I despair thus? No, not I! I thinks to myself, knowing the habits of birds better than most—we 'ave to know such things in our trade—he 'as put it near by, so's to be able to come and gloat on it. They love to go and gloat on what they 'ave taken, do daws. Then I noted that rotten stump o' branch just convenient to the bird where he took the air, and I says 'Yureeker,' which is, being interpreted, 'Found.' But I didn't touch that bole; no, I trusted to my induction. I was as sure it was there as though I'd seen it, and I wanted to lead up to it step by step so's ye might be witness to the discovery. Weren't I right?

"That's why I asked you all to be brought 'ere. That's why I took you all out and made the thing clear to you before your own eyes; William Collop said he'd find the hem'rald where his induction told him it would be. And there he found it!"

His face was irradiated with no common glory.

"An' now," he said, at the end of this harangue, and plunging his hand into his coat pocket to fish out the gem, "now I restore it—'Ullo!" he frowned; the groping of his hand in his pocket looked like some small animal fighting in a bag. "'Ullo!" he repeated and still he groped. "'Ullo—'ullo! Wot's this!" His face grew black. He eyed successively with some disfavour the Professor, Mc-

Taggart and Galton. "You were all close together," he said suspiciously, "as we came through that winder!" Then suddenly, "Ah! 'ere it is! Smother me if it 'adn't gone through a hole in the lining. That's my missus, that is. She's that careless." And turning the receptacle inside out he gingerly picked the jewel from the tear between the sateen, with threads still attached to its setting.

"There now! Wot was I saying? I restore it to its rightful owner!" And with a bow, unlike that of Lord Chesterfield's dancing master, he handed it to Marjorie.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Collop, thank you!" said Marjorie. "Thank you a thousand times. I don't know how to thank you!"

"It's really very remarkable, Mr. Collop, very remarkable indeed. Very remarkable," said the Home Secretary. He went so far as to wring his subordinate by the hand. "We are infinitely obliged to you."

The guilty three were less enthusiastic; but they murmured as though they would be polite—though Galton's murmur, overheard by Vic, was, "I believe he pinched it himself!" And Vic answered in a second whisper, "Fat-head!"—a chosen epithet delivered with such real contempt in the slit of a dark eye as made the poor horse-puller wince.

Then Aunt Amelia bleated:

"I don't quite understand. *Who* does Mr. Collop say stole the emerald?"

"Amelia! Amelia!" protested her brother severely.

"But I want to know," began poor Aunt Amelia pathetically. "I didn't hear properly. I want to know who it is has been found to have stolen the . . ."

Her brother interrupted desperately.

"I'm so sorry," he cried, turning to the others, but directing his remarks particularly and courteously to McTaggart, as the stranger. "You must excuse my sister. She does not always hear."

"I must thank you myself, personally and warmly, Mr. Collop," said Marjorie, the ancient courtesy of the Bohuns strong in her veins. "We'd all got lousy with worry, and you've hit the cocoanut."

"Thank you, Miss, I'm sure," said Mr. Collop, bowing again in the manner aforesaid.

And they all drew apart to various rooms, but Victoria Mosel, lingering for a moment, whispered in Mr. Collop's ear, "I saw it in your hand *before* the tree!" The detective started. "For Gawd's sake!" he pleaded under his breath.

"All right, I don't give people away." She nodded reassuringly and slipped away. . . . Hence for so many years the devoted service of Mr. Collop whenever Victoria cared to summon him.

The Home Secretary had detained McTaggart, catching his arm as he turned to go, and had said, "Wait a moment, Mr. McTaggart, wait a moment. Mr. Collop, I think it is only just to say in your presence that I had repeated to this young gentleman—not my suspicions—they were not my suspicions—but what I had been told were the suspicions of others."

Mr. Collop bowed again in the aforesaid manner.

"Mr. McTaggart," the Home Secretary continued, "I'm going to ask Mr. Collop to let us have a few words together alone. Mr. Collop, where may I see you in five minutes?"

"Where you will," said Mr. Collop with chivalry. "I'll be looking at the old paintings in the 'all. The ancestors,

I've seen them in the ball room already," he added, nor was there any irony in his innocent soul.

When he had shut the door behind him, the poor old Home Secretary put an almost fatherly hand on McTaggart's shoulder.

"My dear young sir," he said, "what can I do? How can I apologise? It is not enough to ask you to forgive me. May I ask to communicate with you when we reach town?"

The mind of McTaggart was not alert, but even he foresaw the possibilities. Politicians have not very great power nowadays save in patronage; that they still do retain; of public money there are some odd millions every year at the disposal of the politicians. It is only fair to say that most of them are content with moderate pickings for themselves and their connections.

Therefore did McTaggart answer with a natural pre-science of coming advantage. "It is very good of you, sir. May I call at the Home Office?"

"Yes, yes. Shall we say Thursday at noon?" De Bohun marked it in a little pocket book and then joined Collop in the hall, as McTaggart walked off.

"Mr. Collop," he said, "won't you come back and talk to me a moment in private?"

They returned together. And exactly the same scene was rehearsed, except that he dared not put a hand on the shoulder of such a being as Collop.

"Mr. Collop," he said, "you know that the Department of which I am the head is proud of you."

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Collop sedately. "Thank you very much." He then added: "I have only done my duty. . . ." But I am glad to say that he did not add "as a

man is bound to do," for if he had done that de Bohun, whose nerves were already on edge, might have had a fit. However, he meant something of that kind. So let it be credited to him.

"Mr. Collop," went on the Home Secretary, "when I go to the office to-morrow, Monday, I hope you will allow me to make a particular point of seeing you. Men of your kind must not be wasted."

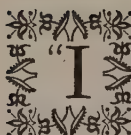
"Thank you, sir," said Collop again, in a tone which showed a full sense of his worth. "I shall always be at your orders."

And so, you will say, the great thing ended.

Wrong again.

De Bohun had sunk back into his chair, now at last at rest. There were still inexplicable things drifting through his mind. He had vague memories of Galton accusing his cousin the Professor, and the Professor accusing McTaggart, and McTaggart spotting Collop; of himself accusing McTaggart; of the boy Ethelbert accusing Galton. He even had confused recollections of their actually swearing to things they had seen which they could not have seen. But he sighed with deep content at the solution of it all, and he thought of his daughter's relief. He decided to worry himself with contradictions no more. The emerald had been found; a bird had taken it, and no one was to blame. That man Collop had genius. . . . Marjorie would be in a better temper now. He shut his tired eyes. He was on the point of falling into a short sleep after so much strain when there was a knock at the door, and he saw as he opened his eyes again, not too pleased at being wakened, the august, the discreet, the considerable figure of George Whaley.

Chapter Sixteen

 BEG your pardon, sir! May I have the honour of a moment's confidential word with you?"

The refined, the courteous phrase, was followed by a discreet cough. The cough was a trifle mechanical, the words a little too rapidly spoken, as is (alas!) the common fate of words learned by heart for a set piece, whether by front benchers or perjuring policemen. What followed was marred by the same slight defect, but it was at least clear. It rattled out—to quote a noble simile from the *Wallet of Kai Lung*—"like a stream of pearls dropped into a bowl of jade."

"There has come to my knowledge sir which would grieve my 'eart to distraction and breaking were it not overcome by the more powerful emotion of gratitude for so many happy years passed under this 'ere roof at Paulings I mean this roof at Paulings and formerly when we had a town house if I may make so bold in one hundred and twelve Curzon Street Mayfair moved by this my 'eart would not let me keep silent. Oh! sir. I know the dread secret and if I come to speak of it it is from loyal affection and no other cause and here and now I put at your service as in duty bound all that has come" . . . here Mr. Whaley suddenly clasped a fat right hand against his chest: He ought to have done it at the word "heart," but the brakes had slipped and he had run past the station . . . "all that has come to the knowledge of these poor humble ears of mine

which would rather have been closed in death than have suffered the agony of them fatal news but told it shall not be to other human soul nor yet only to you for the respect I bear to that 'igh name of Deeboon which saving your honour sir . . ."

Humphrey de Bohun put his lean hands on his lean knees, sat up, and stared at this high-g geared human gramophone on speed.

"What on earth . . ." he began. "Look here, Whaley, have you been drinking? . . . Now, mark me, Whaley!" Humphrey de Bohun could speak with astonishing decision when he felt quite secure that the person spoken to was unable to answer back. "I've always made one absolute rule in this house. Any servant of mine who is found the worse for liquor—I don't care *where*," and he swept his feeble head down to the southwest, "I don't care *how*"—he swept it again—"I don't . . . damn it, I don't even care on *what*! leaves me there and then!" He leaned back again, somewhat exhausted.

"You wound me, sir," said George Whaley with dignity. "Ah, sir! you wound me! Indeed you do!"

"Wound your what?" said the Home Secretary, without sufficient consideration.

"My honour, sir," said George Whaley. "And a loyal heart."

This time he remembered the connection of the word "heart" with the appropriate gesture, and he planked his hand on his merrythought with the noise of a distant g.2.

The Home Secretary remembered the lessons of his youth, the high traditions of the de Bohuns.

"I owe you an apology, Whaley," he said, in the ap-

propriate faded-earnest manner. "But the truth is, I can't pretend to follow what you were saying. I don't suggest that you spoke too quickly. . . . I was in a reverie when you came in. The fault is mine. Proceed."

And in his turn George Whaley proceeded—but the chain was broken; he was thrown back upon impromptu too; and a native terseness, not to say inhibition of speech, returned to him.

"Well, sir," and he coughed, "I'm afraid it's rather a delicate matter," and he looked at the nails of his fingers. "Perhaps I ought to plunge *in medias res*." He sighed. "I've 'eard it's usually the wiser plan in cases like these."

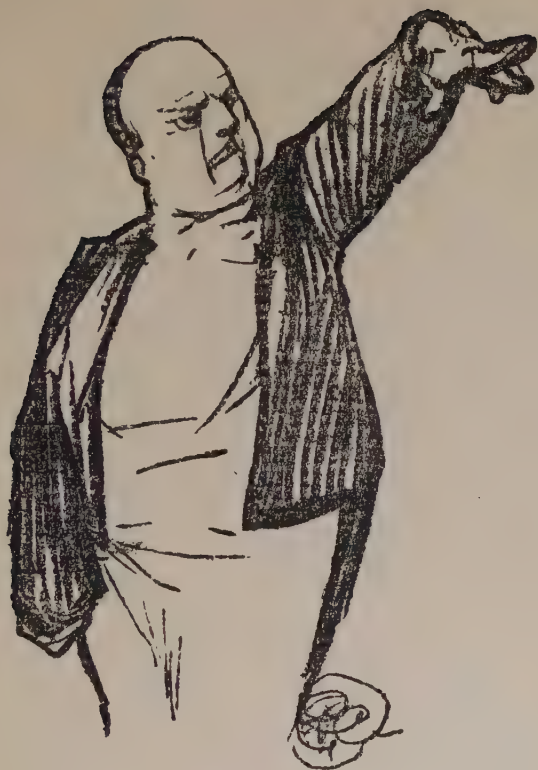
He stood for some fifteen seconds, his bold head with its fringe of grey hair slightly on one side, and gazing at the exalted culprit with infinite compassion. Then did George Whaley begin to shake that head, and there escaped him words unusual to his daily life, but native to his reading of fiction and to his experience on the stage.

"Ah me! Ah me!" he said.

"Look here, Whaley," said his master smartly. "What's the matter? Are you ill? Are you mad? Have you"—in a softer voice—"have you perhaps suffered some sudden bereavement?"

"Only the bereavement of a loyal heart deceived, bewildered," moaned George Whaley, quoting textually from *The Waifs of the Whirlwind*. He linked his hands before his ample waistcoat and hung his saddened head.

"Upon my word!" cried Humphrey de Bohun, moved to unexpected energy by an intolerable boredom, "this kind of thing's got to stop. Speak out, man, and don't make a fool of yourself!" He pulled out his watch. "I've not got all



*The Home Secretary's Butler taking the
liberty to observe: "Thou art
the man."*

the time there is! Hurry up, now! Surely you can speak plainly!"

"I can," said George Whaley, in tones of gloom, and moved by a mighty resolution. He was standing upright now; he fixed his employer with a steady glance, and each hand was half clenched at his side. "The emerald, sir!"

And he waited for his effect.

"Oh, damn the emerald!" shouted Humphrey de Bohun. "If you think this is the time, after all these two days . . ."

"It *is* the time," said George Whaley firmly, with a reminiscence of the worthy mother who had brought him up in the Countess of Huntingdon's connection and under all the discipline of the Jacobean Scriptures. "Yea, now is the acceptable time."

"By God!" shouted the now inflamed minister, "this has got to stop! I'll have you certified! I'll . . . I'll . . ."

But he got the thing full in the face. In a key nearly an octave lower than that he had been using for the purposes of the great interview, George Whaley stretched out a rigid solemn arm towards his master and spoke the words of doom.

"I know all. . . . Thou art the man! It is you, sir, that have on you the lost emerald!"

Let me not do Humphrey de Bohun injustice. He had never yet in his life taken an initiative. He had never tackled any one of the human species. But there is a god latent in us all, and his name is Pan.

"The emerald!" he shrieked. "Blackmail, eh, you damned lousy son of a ——!" He sprang at the astonished servitor, seized him round the neck—a dangerous gambit between elderly men, for it leads to strokes on both sides—

shook him madly from side to side, then dug his right hand into his collar behind, swerved him round, and gave him one of those enormous kicks which form epochs in the history of Britain. Savagely did the unrestrained elder statesman, all the repressed manhood of half a century bursting forth, plant his foot upon what should properly be called the person of his unfortunate dependant and with a second gesture sent him sprawling through the open door into the hall.

"The emerald!" he kept on shouting, as George Whaley, groaning, pulled himself up miserably, like a wounded sea lion. "When the hell am I to hear the last of the emerald . . . you and your emerald! . . . all of you and your emeralds! . . . I wish to God! . . ." A blasphemy was almost on his lips; he had almost said that he wished the emerald had been strangled at birth, and by such a phrase would he have forfeited the luck of the Boneses.

"Get out!" he continued, in a somewhat milder because exhausted tone, as the ill-treated Good Samaritan hobbled towards the door which led to the offices, rubbing the affected portions of his frame. "Out! Out! Out! Never let me see your face again!"

And they parted to meet no more. The conclusion of their mutual relations was concluded by correspondence.

It is not with impunity that men between fifty and sixty, especially if they have lived under constant self-repression—which doesn't apply to colonels—let their angry passions rise. The Home Secretary was badly blown. He felt groggy. His exertion was already beginning to make him a little stiff. He halted towards the dining-room and groped

for a pint of champagne which he knew to stand by. He pulled the cork with his last strength. He took a mighty draught. He felt better. He took another. Then he saw the world sanely, and he saw it whole—such is the power of the god. There was hardly a drain left. He glanced over his shoulder, found himself alone, put the neck of the bottle to his lips and sucked it down.

“Ah!” said the arbiter of Wormwood Scrubbs and Lord of Pentonville. “That’s better.”

He felt almost genial—normal, anyhow, at last. Even a trifle super-normal. With sprightlier step he regained that comfortable chair wherein he had been relaxing his overstrained mind when George Whaley had so imprudently intruded.

It was not once in a blue moon that Humphrey de Bohun thought tobacco a boon, but the occasion called for it. For the matter of that, it was not once in a blue moon that he drank more than half a glass of wine at a sitting—let alone of a Sunday morning during church time—and bubbling wine in plenty leads to smoking: hence the fortunes made by Greeks and Egyptians in their sales of hay cigarettes to the young bloods. Humphrey de Bohun groped in his daughter’s open box for a cigarette, tapped it, with a surprisingly modern gesture, on his thumbnail, and as he lit it sank back into the chair he had left and wondered whether indeed he had reached repose.

Was there anyone left, he thought drowsily, who could come with yet another story of the blasted gem? He was already half asleep, but there passed before his drooping eyes what seemed a regiment: Galton had been sure of it—he had seen it, seen it on Bill; Bill had been sure of it—

he had tested it, tested it on McTaggart; McTaggart had been sure of it—he had got it by second sight, and was absolutely certain of Collop; and Collop—oh well! God bless Collop! For after all he had *produced* it—snatched from the talons of a fowl. The elderly gentleman's head drooped and nodded; the cigarette fell from his lax fingers; it set fire to the Aubusson carpet, which smouldered in faint wreaths, but did no harm, and soon went out. Thus did the adventure of the Emerald of Catherine the Great end, as all things end, in smoke.

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Far, far, in the less pretentious but roomy apartments of the East Wing, George Whaley, suffering untold things, sought for and found the Boy, the culprit, Ethelbert.

They met in the passage that leads from the servants' hall to the Yard; but when I say met, I rather mean that their visages encountered the one the other at the turn of a corner separated by a space of some five yards.

The countenance of George Whaley at that moment was not one to inspire confidence in the young. There was blood on his cheek-bone. His collar was torn, and all adrift upon the starboard side; his tie was under his ear; there was a gaping tear in his coat.

"Ow! You young dose of poison!" bawled the injured man, as he lunged forward upon his prey, and with a loud cry Ethelbert fled. He fled through the open door into the coal yard, George Whaley limping after. There stood against the wall of the yard, leaning to its summit, a crazy old ladder. The light boy Ethelbert nipped up it, and at its foot stood the unhappy and ponderous victim of his misleading confidences, shaking an impotent fist.



*Dialogue between the Boy Ethelbert and his
fallen superior.*

Security lent courage to the youth.

"You look hot," he said kindly.

"You come down!" hissed Whaley, clenching his teeth, "and I'll flay you alive—slowly—inch by inch!"

"Sounds good," grinned Ethelbert; with thoughtful prevision he kicked the ladder down. Its rotten wood smashed into a dozen pieces as it fell, and the youth was delighted to note that a flying fragment had caught his superior a fine smack on the side of the jaw.

For to him that hath, more shall be added.

Ethelbert feared not the future; his judgment told him, not insecurely, that the butler's powers were at an end.

"Been havin' a scrap?" continued Ethelbert, by way of making conversation. "'Ow's the other man?"

George Whaley's cup was full. "Come down," he groaned stupidly. "Come down!"

"Me come down?" answered his former subaltern with an air. "Why, what can you be thinking of? It's only just over church time yet. You can hear the sweet bells ringing—'ark!" and he lifted an ecstatic forefinger with heavenward-lifted eyes.

The butler put his hand upon the old red brick wall. His adventures were beginning to tell upon him. He felt sick.

"It's all along o' you!" he said thickly, spat, to see whether his lungs were injured, was pleased to find they were not; then, still suffering, repeated, "It's all along o' you! What," he added in a higher key of tragic indignation, "what the burning hell did yer mean by telling me the boss had pinched the emerald?"

"I tell you the boss had pinched the emerald?" sneered Ethelbert from his high place. "Oh, chase me, Ananias!"

"Yes, yer did!" came again from the uplifted purple face. "Yer told me with yer own lips that you knew yerself it was in the 'ands of the 'ighest."

"I never! You dare say I did!" cried the indignant whelp. "Liar! What I may have *thought* was that his lordship . . ."

"His lordship?" groaned the suffering man, a light breaking in upon him.

"Yes, mubbe! Don't you dare go to say as I said so. Otherwise I'll have the lor on yer! So mind your fat feet! I'll be treading on 'em. I never said nuffing. I didn't. 'Sides which, it's all one now. The emerald's been found."

"Found?" gasped Whaley with a stare.

"Yes, found," nodded Ethelbert, from his dominion of vantage loftily.

"Then . . ." groaned his unfortunate elder, "I'm done!"

"That's true, anyways! Congrats!"

Whaley had already picked up half a brick, but his tormenter had seen the gesture, and had dropped on the far side of the wall to the high bank below, and was off to rejoin his quarters. He knew that the mighty had fallen and would trouble him no more.

So ends the saga.

TALE-PIECE

T WAS the custom of our grandfathers and grandmothers—when they had any of them been fool enough to write a novel—to wind it up with a description of what the various characters in the beastly thing were doing at the moment when the book appeared—that is, supposedly, in a future some little while after the closing of the tale.

Those of you who still read the novels of my own youth—and I for one read no others—will remember that they are invariably concerned with a well-to-do young woman of exquisite beauty who marries a manly young fellow of her own status, after various ups and downs. Then the book goes on to tell you that they have twenty-six boys and girls with long curly hair, all gold. And then the band plays.

It is not easy for me to give you an appendix of this kind, because I have always thought it prudent to throw my own novels into the future, lest I should be sent to gaol for insulting the rich. Moreover, even if I did describe the final fate of my characters, I cannot make it a very pleasant one without treason to the realities of human life and the flattering of fools: and rather than flatter fools let me be torn to pieces by wild horses after the fashion of the Merovingian queens.

However, I propose to give you some idea of how the various people you have come across in these pages continued their not too significant lives.

When Marjorie had divorced Galton—having got married to him by way of preliminary—she was herself divorced by Pemberton—who had no further use for Lady Mainz—and then married—only last year—an extraordinarily fleshy man called (at the moment) Henry Munster. They are still happy—at least, she is. The child of the first union—if I may so describe it—is a girl; so that's the end of the Galton peerage.

Aunt Amelia is dead: and high time.

Her brother, the former Home Secretary, has in the interval developed astonishing talents which have fitted him for the Colonial Office, the India Office, and the Treasury, in rapid succession—and would doubtless have fitted him for the Foreign Office but for the determined opposition of the permanent officials. During the four years in which it had been arranged to let the other batch of professional politicians have a suck at the salaries, he acted as President (at £2,500) of the Commission for the Second Reduction of Wages, wrote a book of reminiscences (£3,000 Gubbins & Gubbins 42s.). He was badly stoned during the progress of the fifth General Strike—some call it the seventh, but I follow the usual numeration. He had been taken by the mob for Henry Gaston, a man nearly forty years younger and twenty times as able—which only shows how important it is to educate the poor, and also, by the way, how important it is not to print in the papers pictures of people taken hundreds of years before the date of their appearance.

William de Bohun is still Professor of Crystallography in the University, where he has still further attained a European reputation. He is now mentioned not only in Swiss papers, but occasionally in German ones. He is not



*Last portrait of Professor de Bohun, a sketch
reproduced in the "Figures Modernes"
of Berne (Switzerland).*

more than seventy-nine, and there is every chance of his retaining the position for a few more years. He has not made it up with the reader in Crystallogy, Mr. Bertran Leader.

I am sorry to say that these two distinguished men actually had a fight in the main street of their academic town, their weapons being umbrellas. Nor would the victory of the younger champion, Mr. B. Leader, have been for a moment doubtful had it not been that the umbrella of the elder, Professor de Bohun, was suddenly blown open by a gust of wind, affording him a sure and certain shield against the frenzied blows of his opponent.

McTaggart has gone under for good. It seems shameful, considering the excellent position on the British Intelligence into which he had been put on a weekly contract at fifteen pounds by the influence of the Home Secretary, who thought some reparation due to him, and still more by the influence of Victoria Mosel, who had squeezed Lord Bernstein's hand. On the other hand it hurts nobody but himself. He is still unmarried.

George Whaley, with his accumulated savings, purchased immediately upon his leaving the service of Humphrey de Bohun, the good will of the Bohun Arms, which I need hardly tell you does not belong to the family, but to a limited company. The pub stands at the gate of the park. Therein he regales the countryside with comic stories of his former employers; the rich middle-class motorists with scandal of the Great; the upper classes who deign to halt there on their way north in their superb cars with obsequience and silence, at a profit of about 30s. the bunch. He has done very well indeed, because it is a convenient

lunching place for people motoring out from London to the north. His son is in this year's Oxford eight, but his daughter, I very much regret to say, has published a book of verse—in Chelsea!

Ethelbert, a bright lad of nineteen, ordered by his master into the special constabulary during the third General Strike—I use the conventional numeration—was so unfortunate as to crack smartly upon the head a high dignitary of the Church of England, and was thereupon put in prison at the instance of Lady Sophia—the eminent cleric's wife—who would take no denial. Upon release, the General Strike being still in progress—it was the first of the really *long* General Strikes, as you will remember, he joined the regular police force, which is ever ready to welcome men of varied experience and initiative. But he never developed the intelligence required for the *agent provocateur*, in which capacity such members of the service as have had personal experience of the cells are commonly employed. He is now past thirty and doing clerical work in the Lost Property Department.

What else remains? The horse, Attaboy, is dead, worn out in faithful labours at the stud. He was the sire of Get-On out of Get-Out. Get-Out, I need hardly tell you, was the sire of Success by Morning Star. Success was the sire of Repetition by Raseuse; and that is how Tabouche won the Oaks. I always did say the little filly would do well, for I have followed the strain—as, long ago, the form—of Attaboy, who now sleeps with his fathers—I means, sires, let alone dams.

As for the parrot, whom I may call the second Attaboy, he is still the cherished, the beloved, of that constant heart,



*Controversy conducted with umbrellas between a
Professor (of Crystallography) and a Reader
(in Crystalloggy) to the University.*

Marjorie; Mrs. Munster, *née* de Bohun, sometime Lady Galton, as also Mrs. Pemberton—yes, Pemberton. So far as I can remember, she is nothing else—so far. Such a charming woman! Touching upon the lovely confines of middle age with large bulges under rather weary eyes. But her father provides handsomely.

As for that father, the head of the family, Humphrey de Bohun—pronounced Deboon—he looks no older. It would be odd if he could. He feels no older—that would be impossible. But he is inclined to colds in the head. He now tells the same story over and over again, the story of the Emerald. And it always ends, “Now guess who it was?” They do not murder him, they give it up; and he dodders out, “Why! It was a jackdaw!”

Victoria Mosel has, since the date of the great discovery of the Emerald, spent week-ends at Basingthorpe, Prawley, Hammerton, Gainger, Bifford, then again at Hammerton, then again at Gainger, after that at Little Wackham. Then at Bifford again, then at Gainger, and, of course, at Prawley. She also stayed at the Breitzes’ place in Silesia for three months, where she shot the bailiff’s dog—by accident. May I tell you that she has spent six weeks in every year on the Riviera? Can I deny that, at this very moment of writing, she is stopping at Hammerton, having passed the last week-end at Gainger and purposing to go on to Bifford?

The years leave no mark upon her temporal frame, for the skin was ever tight upon her bones. But she knows that she is getting on—and not in the City sense of that term either. She already envisages the tomb. I am fond of her. I think she will save her soul.

One great asset which endears her to the rich of her

circle. Sir William Collop is always ready and even eager to come at her bidding to any country house, and there she puts him through his paces, to the enormous joy of the assembled hosts and guests. But she is a good girl—I use the word of a woman now nearing sixty—and she does him no harm. Only, she *does* make him dance. And why *not*?

After dinner, in the palaces of the rich, Sir William Collop is compelled to tell quaint stories of the other rich over whom his position in Scotland Yard gives him insight. Nor is he unwilling. They all call him a good fellow, by which they mean that his accent is as thick as cheese. He will be Collop till he dies. His original name is drowned ten fathoms deep; he is just coming into his pension, and he is an O. B. E. of the third crop.

And the emerald? Ah, my friends! My brothers! I will tell you what happened to the emerald!

When Mrs. Pemberton, formerly Lady Galton, then Mrs. Munster¹ *née* de Bohun, was making the straddle between the Pemberton and the Munster connections—what we call joining the slats—she needed five hundred pounds. It sounds ridiculous. But she did. One often does. She had outrun the constable. She did not want to bother her father, and for the very good reason that he had just got damnably knocked in the Hungarian Phosphates on the erroneous advice of that silly man Mowlem. Well, she had taken the emerald to the man who, Vic had told her,

¹ Oh! Yes! I know all about it. She would have gone on calling herself Lady Galton from husband (save the mark!) to husband. No, child! It's already getting doubtful. In the future time of which I write it was unknown.

was the best expert in London—Mr. Marlovitch, Junior—and (behold!) he had proved to her by infallible tests that it was *paste*. What is more, he had given her proof out of learned books that no emerald of such size ever had existed, or could exist.

The Bohuns had patriotism in their blood. Marjorie gave the famous trinket to the State—let me say to England!—under very easy conditions which earned her, I am glad to say, the entry of her daughter into Parliament. These conditions were modest: the emerald was to be permanently exhibited, in a very large case all by itself, in the British Museum, with a tablet engraved at the expense of England—I mean the State—describing it as the largest Emerald in the world—which it would have been if it had been an emerald—and assuring the honest public that it had been given by Catherine the Great to that member of the ancient family of de Bohuns who had served the interests of the State—or rather, let me say, of England—at the Court of All the Russias, in those days when the Semiramis of the North was the admiration of Europe.

“What!” you’ll exclaim (it’s just like you!), “would that regal woman, that generous if somewhat demanding lady, that broad German strong in her nobility, that Monarch of the Snows, Empress of all the Russias, have fallen to deceiving handsome Bill Bones with a piece of paste?”

Not a bit of it. You little understood the nature of those who serve power. She had given *her* emerald—and an emerald it was—to a man in whom she had the fullest confidence; she had given it him with the order to bestow it at once upon the English captain. But her messenger had

preferred his own interest and had substituted that larger and false one round which all this dance has been led.

And, as the Prime Minister said of his colleague on the front bench who got into trouble over the insurance shares, who shall blame him?

Not I.

THE END

University of St. Francis

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Belloc

The Emerald of Catherine the G



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